

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XIX.

GODFREY AND MARY.

SIR WILLIAM HUNT, followed by his groom, rode quickly away from the gates of Croxham Abbey; leaving Godfrey Mayne, who had attended the baronet from the door, a prey to about the most uneasy excitement that had ever stirred his nature. To Godfrey the proofs appeared now to be indisputable that his father's wife had positively some urgent reason for keeping out of the sight of Sir William.

Coupling this with the dark deed of the past connected with Sir William's dead son, and with Sir William's mysterious accusations, Godfrey asked himself whether it was indeed possible that there could be aught in it. He recalled what Mary Dixon had confided to him—that her mother wished not to meet the baronet, because she did not behave well to him in early days; had, in fact, jilted him for another lover—Dr. Dixon, presumably. Such was the impression, not a very clear one, left on Godfrey's mind, for Mary had not been minutely explicit: she could not well be so when telling tales of her mother. With his whole heart Godfrey hoped it was only this latter trifle: pretty girls jilt men every day: he revered his unsuspicious, single-minded father; and to imagine, only as a fable, that he had been lured into marrying a woman to whom danger or difficulty attached, through past antecedents, was to Godfrey utterly intolerable.

Not of Mary did he, or could he, believe ill. She had become too dear to him for that. If her mother had got into dangerous trouble in the past, Mary, as her loving and beloved daughter, might have been drawn into it so far as to try to shield her; to be striving to shield her still, was but natural; but as to any worse stigma, the young man made up his mind that none such could attach to Mary. The girl herself might need to be shielded now from undue worry and suspicion, and that should be his own business. He had told her that he would protect her as anxiously as he would a cherished and only sister. He meant to do it, no matter at what cost to himself; and

he gave vent to a harsh word of self-reproach for ever having let her know that he had doubted her.

Godfrey turned back into the house, and went upstairs; and met Mary, who had come out of her mother's room, at the turn of the gallery. The traces of tears on her sweet wan face, the sad look in her soft dark eyes, set all Godfrey's veins of pity passionately throbbing: and in the impulse of the moment he whispered a few comforting words, rather too warmly for his adopted rôle of brother. Mary seemed to shrink into herself, and waited silently for him to allow her to pass, bending her head in acknowledgment of his words, but evidently not at all soothed by them.

"Is Mrs. Mayne's foot better?" asked Godfrey. "I hope it is not seriously hurt?"

"Oh no, not seriously, I think. Only enough to confine her for a few days to the sofa in her room."

Mary went one way and Godfrey another. He turned into one of the many rooms, unoccupied, whose window looked upon the thickly-grown trees of the plantation. He stood watching the red glow, left by the sunset, between the dark boughs, until his reflections became too disagreeable to be borne.

"I'll take in the man's sketch-book," he said aloud: "it's hardly time to dress yet."

He was passing through the hall to go out by the entrance near the refectory, when he again met Miss Dixon. She had been into the garden to gather some fresh mignonette for her mother.

"Is that the sketch-book you spoke of?" she said, noticing the book in his hand. "I should like to see it."

"There's nothing in it worth seeing," answered Godfrey, as he put it on one of the hall tables and opened it for her. "A sketch or two of parts of the Abbey, and what looks like a plan of it where it joins the farm; that's all at present. The book is new."

"Why should he sketch parts of the Abbey?—Why should he take a plan of it: if it is a plan?"

"Artists sketch anything—especially idle ones."

"Here's some writing."

It was but a word or two: "Garden," and "south wall:" but Mary Dixon's eyes devoured them as if they were illuminated characters of gold. As Godfrey stood regarding her, a shade of terror seemed to pass over her face.

"What do you see in the words to alarm you, Miss Dixon?"

"Nothing in the words; nothing at all. But the hand-writing," she slowly added, "exactly resembles one that I—I—once saw in the days gone by."

"Some coincidence," lightly spoke Godfrey. "People write much alike now-a-days."

"Yes," she answered; and ran lightly upstairs with her handful of mignonette.

Mr. Cattermole was out ; so Godfrey delivered the sketch-book to Nancy, who said it belonged to him, that he had missed it, and thought he must have left it in the churchyard.

At dinner that evening, Mr. Mayne had most of the talk to himself. Mrs. Mayne, who was lying on the sofa in her dressing-room to rest her foot, had dinner sent up to her. Mary, looking pale and ill, sat as silent and depressed as during the first days of her stay at Croxham, and Godfrey was too much absorbed in her and in his own thoughts, to be very entertaining. When she left the dining-room, Mary stood hesitating which way she should turn. She looked towards the drawing-room, she looked towards the staircase ; as she heard a footstep behind her she turned with a start which frightened poor Hawkins, solemnly advancing towards the hall table with candles, nearly out of his life. Then she began slowly walking upstairs ; but she was not half-way up when the dining-room door opened, and Godfrey overtook her.

"Don't go up," said he, softly. "When you are ill and nervous, talking to your mother always makes you worse." These words set her trembling as she glanced quickly up in his face. "And my father is going up to talk to her, and you will only be in the way. Come down into the drawing-room and take pity on me. You know what a bad hand I am at entertaining myself."

He laid his hand gently on her arm with a new authority which she did not understand, but which she was at the time too broken-spirited to resist. But in her heart she felt afraid of him ; the dreamy vacancy had gone from his eyes, leaving them bright and thoughtful. He was no longer the listless Godfrey of every day, or the irritable Godfrey whose vehemence had sometimes surprised her. She let him lead her down again, passed Mr. Mayne on his way up to his wife, and into the drawing-room. There, by the exercise of tact so clever and careful that she quite failed to appreciate it, he soothed her and then teased her, waited upon and trifled about her, until she laughed at him in her old half-arch, half-contemptuous fashion. For the first time since her fright at the farm-house she was her usual brilliant, saucy self.

"How silly it was of me to have been frightened that other evening when watching for the monk !" she exclaimed.

"Very," returned Godfrey, smiling. "I have never understood what it was that did frighten you."

"My nerves, I suppose ; or want of them. The best of us get frightened in the dark, Mr. Godfrey ; like naughty children."

"I think you want bracing. You would not have been frightened that evening, or to-day in the vestry, if you were in good health."

"Oh, well—perhaps it is so. I'll get a tonic at the chemist's when I next go into Cheston, and some delicious sweet-stuff to eat after it and take the taste out of my mouth. But please do not say anything of this to mamma," she went on, an uneasy tone superseding the

playful one. "She would begin to worry about me; and she has enough little worries of her own—poor mamma!"

Godfrey was delighted that he had had the power to win the girl back to happy lightness. But she soon made use, perhaps unconsciously, of her recovered spirits to wound him. He was trying to hinder her in her work; it was an antimacassar in crewels, of the usual kind.

"You must let me finish this; I've promised it to Ernest for a birthday present."

"Indeed! Does he mean to cover his pillow with it? Or the back of his seat in the dog-cart?"

"He did not tell me which," replied Mary demurely. "I was doing it for Mrs. Underwood, but he saw it, and said he should like it for himself. As his birthday was so near, I thought I would indulge him."

Young Mr. Underwood was coming of age on the following day, and there was to be a ball at the Grange in celebration of it. Godfrey's face clouded.

"He considers himself a man now, I suppose."

"So he is. He is the nicest man I know."

"He will be getting married next, perhaps." A pause. "I should be sorry for the woman who trusted her happiness to such a weather-cock."

"He is not that, I assure you," said Mary steadily, with her eyes upon her work. "I don't say he has any deep resources of feeling or passion, or any disconcerting and uncomfortable qualities of that kind." Godfrey winced. "But as far as I know he is not fickle. I think if he were once engaged to a girl, he is too manly and loyal not to stick to her without one faithless look, or word, or thought."

Godfrey knelt with one knee upon a chair, fidgeting with the blind.

"So you think passion and feeling disconcerting qualities, do you, Miss Dixon?"

"Yes; very."

"You have had an unfortunate experience of them, perhaps?"

He spoke at the moment without any more settled purpose than that of entering upon a topic always fascinating when discussed with a beautiful woman. But her sensitive face contracted at once with a spasm of acute pain which was gone almost immediately.

"Yes, my experience has been rather unfortunate," she said.

"What do you think of—of love?" asked he, rather shyly, catching up a wooden knitting-pin.

"I think it is an awful, terrible madness, to be avoided like a disease," said she in a low voice.

"Oh," cried he, taken aback. "Don't you think people ought to fall in love at all, then?"

"Yes, certainly, if they can do it calmly, sensibly; in the right way."

"How do you mean calmly? It isn't love at all if it's calm."

"Perhaps calm is the wrong word. But I mean that to admire and esteem a person until he or she gradually becomes the most precious thing in the world to one must be the greatest happiness possible in this life; and married life begun like that is nearly sure to be peaceful and sweet."

"But look here! There is a lot of love like that about, but it doesn't seem in real life to be at all the sublime thing you describe. Why, half the people about here married just like that, and they might be sheep for all they get out of existence."

"But they are much better and happier like that," said she with rising excitement. "Do you think they are less to be envied than those brothers or cousins who have ruined their brains and their fortunes by dissipation, and have to drag on their lives through years and years of debt and difficulty in consequence? There are some like that in every family."

"Of course they must pay for their pleasure. But they did get something out of life first."

"You are not in earnest, are you, Mr. Godfrey?"

"Yes, I am. I know you mean I haven't talked like this before; no, because I have not thought it before; a man doesn't know what he thinks until he begins to feel. There's the weak point of your 'calm, peaceful existence': if a man once finds that he can enjoy something stronger, he can't go back quietly to it until he has worn out the capacity for less simple pleasures."

All the serenity he had worked so hard to restore in her was gone in a moment. She looked at him silently, in remorseful terror.

"I have frightened you," said he, with reassuring gravity, as he sat down on the chair he had been playing with. "But you misunderstand me. You are a woman, and I am a man, and we don't look at life in the same way. I believe you think that from an idle young man in the country I am anxious to become a vicious young man in town. That is not so. I have been woke up rather suddenly from the torpid state in which I have lived an ornament to my native parish for so long; but I don't think I shall be less of a man for finding out that I am not a vegetable, and I don't think the—the influence which has done this has anything to reproach itself with."

She grew calmer as he said this; for although he spoke with his eyes fixed earnestly upon her face, his tone and manner were reassuringly quiet and self-possessed.

"Now, what dances am I to have to-morrow night?" he went on in quite a different tone. "You won't believe it, but I assure you I am a better waltzer than the peerless Ernest."

At that moment the door opened and Hawkins came in.

"Miss Wilding would be glad to speak to you for a minute, Master Godfrey, if you are disengaged."

Godfrey went into the library, where he found Nancy with a small packet in her hand.

"Miss Dixon must have dropped a bracelet in our sitting-room the other evening, Master Godfrey. I don't know how it is I didn't find it myself when dusting the room: but Mr. Cattermole picked it up to-day, and he has sent it back."

"And Mr. Cattermole takes the opportunity of enclosing a billet-doux to Miss Dixon, I see!" remarked Godfrey.

"Oh, the note is to apologise for its having been trodden on: or Mr. Cattermole would never have taken the liberty to write."

"Did I understand your people to say Mr. Cattermole was a gentleman, Nancy?" said he, with a sudden, unaccountable impulse of jealousy.

"He can be if he likes, so I reckon he must have been brought up one; but he has fallen down considerably from it," replied Nancy, with a smile in her eyes, for she was sharp enough to understand in a degree the question.

"Why, of course he has. I remember the tobacco and the dirty newspapers. All right, Nancy, I'll give it to Miss Dixon."

"And if you please, I want just to speak to you about Dick," she went on, as Godfrey was moving to the door. "I know you've had to complain of him before; and the other evening, when he ——"

"Oh, you must not think any more of that," said Godfrey. "And as to his having taken this wonderful fancy to Miss Dixon, I am rather glad of it. Dick thought he was defending a lady against a ruffian, or against the dead ——"

"But he thinks so still, I believe, Master Godfrey, and I'm beginning to be afraid of his doing someone a mischief," she interrupted. "He is not so quiet as he used to be, and these last few days I've had trouble with him; and he has taken to rambling about at nights, and may frighten people. He does not mean any harm, as you know, sir: but when a notion gets into his poor head, nobody can get it out. And he has picked up a fancy since that evening when he saw her all pale and frightened and trembling, that Miss Dixon is in danger from someone; and—he takes such prejudices ——" Nancy hesitated to continue.

Godfrey understood her, and laughed. "Dick thinks that 'someone' is myself, I suppose? Never mind, Nancy; the lad won't do me any harm; I shall not be angry with him."

"Thank you, Master Godfrey. You're very kind; I was afraid, after his rudeness the other night, you would perhaps want him sent away again. You see, Miss Dixon has been kind to him and he worships her. Our spare room is next to your schoolroom, you know, sir; and before Mr. Cattermole came, Dick had only to get out on to the wall between the Abbey garden and the farm-yard and

creep along the top of your green-house and put his cones and grasses and rubbish on to the schoolroom window-ledge. And the young lady in her kindness took it all in when she found it, and pretended to be as pleased as if it was diamonds. So he has got to think she's a kind of angel, poor fellow, and if he fancies anyone wants to hurt her, he goes right off his poor head."

Godfrey was touched. "Be at ease, Nancy: he shall not be sent away on my account."

"Thank you, Master Godfrey, that is very kind of you; for I should miss him dreadfully. He is kinder-hearted than are many people who are in their right senses. Mr. Cattermole has taken quite a fancy to him, and lets him go too far: this morning I caught Master Dick playing with his revolver. A pretty toy for my poor brother to be handling! Mr. Cattermole was really shocked when I told him, and locked it up at once."

"And what does Mr. Cattermole want with a revolver?"

"What do men want with half the things they litter the place up with? Especially artists. Not that he colours much except his pipe. Well, good-night, Master Godfrey. I hope Miss Dixon will excuse the damage to her bracelet."

She passed out, and Godfrey went back to the drawing-room. Mary, who had finished her work, was sitting by the table, with her hands clasped on her lap.

"Is it indiscreet to ask if you expect a love-letter?" began Godfrey.

"Have you one for me?" she asked with a forced smile, as she held out her hand. He put the packet into it. She did not open it.

"Our illustrious friend Mr. Cattermole found a bracelet of yours in the sitting-room at the farm, where you must have dropped it the other evening. How is it you didn't miss it!"

"I—I don't know; it is only a little *porte-bonheur*."

"Then she must have missed it," thought he. "Why can't she open the note?"

"Would you mind putting that window up?" she said. "The room is getting so warm."

"Godfrey went to the window and instantly heard her tear the envelope. When he returned, she had put the note into her pocket, and the bracelet had fallen on the floor.

"Was the artist very ardent?"

"Very. It appears I am the lodestar of his existence." Her voice was hard through her attempted playfulness.

Godfrey picked up the tiny bracelet; it was bent out of all shape. "This is quite spoilt," he remarked. "You will never be able to wear it again."

"I dare say not."

"Will you—will you let me keep this, and buy you another?"

"Certainly not."

"Well then, I'll get it mended for you." And he slipped it into his pocket.

She got up restlessly, without paying him much attention, and again complained that it was warm. "I think I must take a little stroll before I go upstairs," said she. "You have been chattering so much that I haven't had a minute's peace this evening."

"Yes, you have—while I was talking to Nancy. You are so tired that you can scarcely stand, and if you go out I shall go with you."

She did not object: perhaps she thought to do so would be useless. It was an uncertain night, now light, now dark, the moon chiefly hiding herself behind dense clouds. They went through the plantation and down the lane together. She was so much exhausted by the emotions of the day that she was glad of his arm to lean upon; but when they got opposite the stables she asked him to do something. Was it to get rid of him?

"I wish you would go and see if I left mamma's card-case in the pocket of the brougham yesterday. She could not find it to-day. It won't take you more than a minute."

It did not take more. For when Godfrey got there, the groom chanced to be unlocking the coach-house door, and he was in and out in no time. He could not see Mary: she must have walked on past a bend in the lane. As he ran to rejoin her, his footsteps sounding sharply on the hard, dry road, he saw someone quit her, or pass her, and disappear over a stile. He thought it looked like the artist.

"Did that man frighten you? You are shaking all over."

"He didn't mean to. But I turned round quickly, thinking it was you; and seeing a stranger, it rather startled me."

"But he was coming the other way—this way!"

"I don't know how it was. I am nervous to-day. You know why."

He drew her hand through his arm, with a pang of compassion, and led her back to the Abbey without another question. It was getting late, and she bade him good-night and went up to her mother's room; while Godfrey smoked a cigar in the refectory, and grew soft and silly over his precious prize, a broken bracelet. Shortly, he went upstairs himself; left his candle in his room, and then paced quietly along the gallery, towards the window at which he had stood with Mary the previous night.

At that moment the moon was under a cloud again, and the gallery was in darkness. As he passed the back staircase, which was nearly opposite the schoolroom door, he fancied he heard the faint sound of a sharply-drawn breath. He whispered quickly, "Who is that," and put out his hand. It touched a face. He pulled out his cigar-lights and struck one. It was Mary Dixon. She stood cowering against the wall in terror, her face white.

"My poor child!—what has happened?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing," she whispered faintly. "When I got as far as here, after staying with mamma, I thought I heard something, and I felt afraid to go into my room."

"Afraid of the dark? And your lamp is out. Poor child!"

He took the tiny lamp she always used from her hand and lit it; but still she did not move.

"Look here. I will go into the schoolroom and light the candles for you, and then you won't mind going into your own room."

She held back his arms as he touched the door handle. "No, no, thank you, I shall be all right now."

But Godfrey's ears had also caught a sound inside the schoolroom. He dashed open the door; and as he did so, someone sprang upon him from the window. For one moment they struggled together in the dark, for the lamp had fallen and was out again; and then Godfrey stood over his assailant, pinning him on the floor.

"He's a devil; he wanted to hurt her; to take her away," muttered a voice. "But you sha'n't, Master Godfrey; you sha'n't!"

"It's Dick!" cried Mary. "Oh, thank heaven, it's only Dick!"

CHAPTER XX.

FACE TO FACE WITH SIR WILLIAM.

As Godfrey turned at Miss Dixon's exclamation, Dick Wilding jumped up, flew to the open window, and with the agility of a cat, alighted upon the woodwork on the top of the greenhouse, and was making his way homewards, before his foe could give him so much as a shaking.

"Who did you fear it was?" said Godfrey to her.

"I never thought of Dick," she faintly answered. "I thought of — of Hawkins —"

"Ah, yes," said Godfrey, apparently seeing nothing astonishing in this suggestion.

But she saw that he was not deceived; that he suspected she had been entertaining some more terrible fear.

"Mr. Godfrey, we will talk about it to-morrow; I am too tired to-night," she said, tremulously, supporting herself against the table. "When I got to that part of the corridor and thought I heard sounds, I was too frightened to stir —"

He had lighted the candles, and he turned and looked down upon her in a tumult of passionate pity, as he interrupted what she was saying.

"Look here. You need not trouble your poor little head to think of excuses and explanations for me. I don't wish to hear them. But if ever you want to escape out of any difficulty, or any fear, whether fancied or real, or — or to avoid any danger you don't want to meet,

just come to me and say, 'Godfrey, help me,' and I will pour out my heart's—I mean I will put forth my best strength to aid you. Do not shrink away; do not mistake me: I am not making love to you," continued he, utterly unconscious that, motionless as he was standing before her, deliberately as he was forcing himself to speak, something in his face and voice made this a transparent mistake: "and I never will. But I want you to see that whatever happens, whatever you like to do, whatever you have done, there is always one person in the world to whom you can go, and who will protect and shield you."

She sank down on a chair, with her arms on the table, and laying her head upon them, burst into tears. Godfrey turned to the window, clasping his hands together with a grip like iron, while calling up all his self-control. But for the time and place, he would have liked to take her to his breast and comfort her.

"Don't cry; you had better not cry," said he, apathetically.

"I cannot help it," she answered, getting back her self-command in very shame at showing the weakness; and she raised her head and dried her eyes, without looking at him. "I have never in all my life before had anyone to go to for help in need."

He could not restrain a sudden movement, and she turned to him quickly.

"You cannot help me," said she, "more than by just that—letting me see that you are sorry for me; that you will not help to chase me down. Listen," she continued, stopping the outburst on his lips, "I will just tell you this; yes, yes, I want to tell you, and I am not saying anything but truth to you now. More than two years ago, when I was scarcely nineteen, I did something wrong; something to ruin my whole life." She glanced up, and saw, by the acute pain that mingled with the pity in his face, that he was mistaking her words. "No, no!" she cried eagerly, with a burning blush; "it was not—not anything that you would be likely to think of: but it was something very foolish and wrong, and it spoiled my life and happiness."

"Yes," breathed Godfrey, in agitation: and waited for her next words.

"It was the work of a rash mad impulse; of love, not for a man, but for a woman. I cannot tell you what it was, or even its nature, because there were others concerned in it, and it might be dangerous, and I have bound myself by cruel promises that I must keep. But I can tell you this: mine was not the worst guilt, though it is mine to have the worst punishment. And there is no escape."

"But there shall be," said Godfrey, with trembling lips.

"No, no," she said, wearily, "there cannot be. And—" dropping her voice, and casting a shuddering glance around her—"I am afraid that I am being hunted down. If so—why, then there will perhaps never more be any escape for me in this world. Now good-night; thank you for your kindness. I don't know why I have told you this,"

she added in a bewildered manner, "and perhaps you won't believe me, because I have told you other things that you did not believe. But though I seem to have given you different versions of the same story, I have never told you a real falsehood since—since that first evening down by the churchyard wall. And—and you were so kind to me then, that—that I was ashamed, bitterly ashamed, of having done so. Good-night."

"Before I go," said Godfrey, holding her hand and noticing her still nervous manner, "you had better go into your room and make sure that no hobgoblins are there to frighten you. Whatever happens, you may trust me, you know," changing his tone from the light one he had purposely put on.

She went in, and came back with a look of relief, saying it was all safe—as if she *had* feared hobgoblins. Godfrey had opened the big cupboard which stood on the left-hand side of the schoolroom fireplace, and taken from a shelf at the top a box of nails, screws, and curtain-rings. He shut the window by which Dick had entered, and began hammering a long nail into the wood, beside the fastening, with the poker.

"You can push back the catch of a window with the blade of a knife, you know," he observed to Miss Dixon. "I've often done it myself when I was a boy, to get at the apples in the store-room. But you can't if there's a nail in. So now you can sleep quietly without fear of invasion from that idiotic Dick. Though the fellow came, I believe, in faithfulness."

She held out both hands impulsively at the schoolroom door. "I shall never forget your kindness this evening, as long as I live."

He pressed the fingers impulsively to his lips. It seemed to alarm her, and she fell to trembling again.

"No, no, you promised to be—to be only my friend. Remember, I am at your mercy now," she whispered piteously.

"As my dear sister," he whispered back.

Godfrey could not help feeling hurt by her avoidance of him the next day. Surely she might trust him! What it was, that she had done in the past, he could not imagine; or what she meant by the expression she had used of being "hunted down." That the crime—if crime there was—was not hers, he felt certain; though she might have been drawn helplessly into its consequences. Was it her mother's? And of whom was she afraid? Not a single private word did he get with her all day: which did not lessen his own state of suspense and uneasiness.

It was the evening of the ball at Colonel Underwood's. When Mary came down stairs dressed for it, she seemed to Godfrey so daz-zlingly lovely that he hardly dared to look at her. She was in cream satin and tulle, with deep red roses from breast to shoulder, and in the coils of her dark hair. Mrs. Mayne, still enjoying the privileges

of an invalid, was not going, and Mary was to be under the particular care of Mrs. Underwood, as Mr. Mayne intended to return early.

Elsbeth and Matilda Thornhill were in white, and wore roses ; but it was white that just wanted the softening tint of cream, and the flowers in their hair were placed just a little too high on the one head, and a little too low on the other. In Godfrey's eyes, the only girl whose appearance was perfect was Mary Dixon ; and by some subtle instinct, the other and less fastidious men in the room seemed to think so too. She was the beauty of the evening. Godfrey, who devoted assiduous and indiscriminating attention that night to all his other partners, including Elspeth, concerning whom he had certain twinges of remorse as she reproached him for not calling more frequently, was silent and stupid when his first dance with Mary came. He had not boasted without reason of his waltzing, and when they had been round the room a few times, and were resting, she looked up at him, smiling with surprise and pleasure.

"You waltz better than any man in the room."

"You have thought I was a muff at everything, have you not," said he, in a low voice. But he was in a state of inward delight. He was not jealous that night of even Ernest, who of course felt himself justified in absorbing a great deal of Miss Dixon's attention. For whatever share of her confidence young Underwood might have, he had more. However much that boy might get of her talk and laughter, it was he, Godfrey, whose hand would help her in difficulty or danger. He had plenty to say to her, but unfortunately nothing that he might say ; so when the waltz was over he led her out into the wide hall, where the lights were kept low, and flowers and leafy plants were piled up in the corners, and sat down beside her on a low soft velvet couch, and stroked his moustache and said nothing. And she did not repress him by a flow of small talk, but let him feel that he had her confidence by quietly fanning herself, without taking the trouble to entertain him. When another came to claim her hand for the next dance, Godfrey remained lounging in the hall, unwilling to break the spell that waltz had cast upon him by plodding through a dull quadrille with some wretched girl, who would expect him to talk. He could afford to be magnanimously sorry that the fellow Mary was dancing with was evidently boring her to death, as he glanced into the ball-room to catch a furtive glimpse of her. As the music ceased and the sets broke up, he turned back again to the hall, just as she and her partner passed out and crossed to the morning-room for an ice. Then there was a sound of wheels at the door, and a late arrival. Godfrey turned to see who it was.

It was Sir William Hunt.

Sir William shook hands with Godfrey as he passed him ; regretting that Mrs. Mayne, for whom he enquired, had not been well enough to come. "But I shall have the pleasure of seeing Miss Dixon at last, at any rate," he observed, as he moved away to meet

Colonel Underwood, and tell him he had felt so moped at home that evening, he thought he would come out for an hour.

Godfrey crossed the hall and entered the conservatory. Mary was sitting with her late partner, enjoying the scent of the flowers and the comparatively cool air. As Godfrey, on fire with this new anxiety, which all his efforts could scarcely hide, came up, he fancied he saw in the darkness, outside, a man's face appear and disappear, but he was in too feverish a state to be sure of his own eyesight. Mary saw by his looks that something was wrong. As an excuse to get her away, he told her that Mr. Mayne was looking for her, wanting to know whether she was ready to go home.

"Why no, not yet," said she, surprised. "If he wants to go early, as he said, I am to go back with you, you know."

"I thought perhaps you might be tired." Then, as her late partner bowed and left them together, he threw himself into the seat beside her and said below his breath, "Sir William Hunt is here."

She turned pale, but did not move. He had just begun: "Let me take you home now—if you would like to go," when voices at the door made him look up, and he saw Colonel Underwood enter with Sir William. Mary glanced at them but gave no sign; Sir William looked from Godfrey to her and evidently asked his host some question, but the young man caught the answer, which was:

"Pretty! I should think so; she is the belle of the room." And they came forward to the window.

"That is Sir William Hunt," said Godfrey to her in a low voice, bewildered by this apparent want of recognition, and then the colour rushed to the girl's face.

In another moment the introduction was over, and Godfrey felt sure from the baronet's manner, more easily read than Miss Dixon's, that he had never seen her before; and as far as he could judge he decided that she had never seen him. He left them talking together, the old gentleman evidently much impressed by her beauty.

Bewildered by this strange discovery, mad with the joyful relief it brought, Godfrey sauntered out into the garden, away from the music and the lights and the crowd, to puzzle himself afresh. Were they only very clever actors, both of them, he wondered, as he drew instinctively near to the window of the room where he had left them. He was strolling over the grass by the side of the house, among the trimly-cut yew trees with which this part of the lawn was dotted. A few yards from the window he stopped short, for among the tall rhododendrons in the bed close to the house there was something moving, faintly stirring the branches. He remembered the fancy he had had when he first approached Mary and her partner in the window-seat; and now, with little doubt that it would prove to be an unwarrantable intruder, he stepped behind a yew tree to watch. The night was dark, warm, and still, but there came a stream of light from the window of the room; and the spy, whoever it might be,

kept well under the bushes. Godfrey could plainly see Mary's beautiful profile, as she got up and went away, Sir William with her. In another moment he saw the rhododendron bush in front of the window stirred again, and by the slight movement of the branches he could track the passage of the unseen figure along the flower-bed, under the wall of the house towards the front door, past the yew-tree behind which he himself was standing, unseen. It halted near him. But Godfrey could only catch the merest outline of the figure. The man wore a grey, broad-brimmed hat, slouched over his face.

Close upon that, Sir William came out of the house, and began strolling towards the window of the morning-room. His keen sight detected the figure standing amid the bushes, and that it looked like someone who could have no business there.

"Who are you?" cried Sir William: "What do you want?"

"I beg your pardon," said the intruder, in a soft, gentlemanly tone, "I am waiting to try to get speech of someone. Can you tell me whether Sir William Hunt is here to-night?"

"I am Sir William —. You are come here to seek for me!" impulsively broke off the baronet, an idea seizing him upon the one subject that was never long absent from his mind: "You are the detective from Scotland Yard!"

"Yes," replied the man, after a pause.

"I could not imagine why you did not come down at once—as soon as I wrote. The right man was not at liberty, I suppose?"

"Just so, Sir William," came the whispered response. "But," continued the stranger, with another pause, "I may as well tell you that I have been down here a few days. When we know the matter upon which we are called out, we like, if practicable, to keep ourselves quite quiet for a short time in the suspected neighbourhood, and make our own silent observations and private enquiries."

"Quite right, quite right; of course you detectives are adepts at your own business," assented Sir William. "Are you fully acquainted with the matter upon which I need your services—the murder of my son in Rome?"

"Almost better than any other man you could employ, sir, since I was in Rome about that same time, and heard a good deal of it."

Sir William Hunt quite started at the unexpected answer. "Dear me! How fortunate!—how providential, I may say, that you should be at liberty to come down here! Did you know who it was that committed it?"

"I think so, Sir William."

"Ah, then, our task may be an easy one. I believe the people are now in this neighbourhood, or have been recently. They seem to elude me like magic, and I am again utterly at a loss."

"It may prove a more complicated affair than you imagine, sir, and I will frankly tell you that, professional detective as I am, I doubt if I

myself could make head or tail of it had I not chanced to be in Rome. I went to Rome after a bank clerk who had absconded, and reached it a few days after your son's murder. I found out all I could about it just by professional instinct; and I should have found out a good deal more if I had not had to follow my own man to New York. But that you had already again left Rome, Sir William, I might have been able to put you on the right track there and then."

Sir William touched the officer. "What did you find out?" he asked.

"I found out what Mr. Hunt's habits had been, sir, and who he was mostly seen with. His tutor was a young man of the name of Robertson, who wore glasses."

"Yes, yes. Well?"

"I found out that Mr. Hunt had had a quarrel with one of his companions on the night of his death: it was about a young lady, I believe: he and she both disappeared after the murder, and were never traced."

"Did you see that companion of my son's?" eagerly questioned Sir William.

"I saw a likeness of him," replied the detective. "He was painted as a young, fair, slight man, looking almost like a boy. I learnt that he had been regarded in Rome as an idle, worthless sort of young chap, with persuasive manners and a way of getting round people."

"Ay ay," assented Sir William with emotion. "You have not told me your name. What is it?"

The answer was given in too low a tone to reach Godfrey. Some stir occurred just then at the hall door: three or four young men, heated with dancing, came out. Sir William and his companion both turned their heads that way to look.

"We had better walk about a little," whispered Sir William.

They stole away, under the dark shade of the trees, in the contrary direction to that in which Godfrey was standing, and were lost to his view. Godfrey had not obtained a clear view of the detective officer, or heard his voice above a whisper; yet a suspicion, alarming and disagreeable, had arisen in his mind. Rather miserable and very anxious, he returned to the ball-room to receive another shock.

The next dance on the programme was a waltz, which Mary had promised to him, so he went in search of her through the rooms; but he could not find her, and he noticed that Ernest Underwood was missing too. He returned to the hall just in time to see Mary, her face disfigured by tears, come out of the library, flit across to the staircase, and run up. Wondering what could be amiss, he went to the foot of the stairs to await her return and to claim her hand for his promised dance. Ernest, violently excited, had followed her out of the library and run up a few steps after her, bidding her make haste; coming down again, he faced Godfrey.

"The next dance is mine," said the latter, rather stiffly.

"Oh, but it is the supper-dance; surely you dance that with Miss Thornhill," cried Ernest, his temper rising.

"No; with Miss Dixon."

They looked steadily at each other; Ernest was loud and restless, Godfrey languid and soft-voiced to affectation, both assuming the manner best calculated to annoy the other. For both knew quite well that at heart they were rivals.

"Miss Dixon has promised the supper-dance to me," said Ernest.

"I think you will find my name on her programme for the fourth waltz," returned Godfrey, stroking his moustache.

"Perhaps we had better let Miss Dixon decide the matter?"

"I think so, certainly."

She was coming downstairs at this moment, pale, with the traces of tears still visible in her eyes: which made her doubly interesting in the sight of the two young men impatiently waiting for her decision.

"I think this is my waltz, Miss Dixon, isn't it?"

"It's the supper-dance," said Ernest.

She turned to Godfrey. "I'm so sorry. I promised this—a long time ago to—to Ernest," she answered, watching him nervously.

He bowed and stepped back, while she went off on Ernest's arm. By a lucky chance he almost ran against Elspeth, for he would not have remembered to look for her. They waltzed and went in to supper together, Godfrey not knowing in the least what he was saying to her, though he chattered and laughed and drank all through supper, his eyes wandering in Mary's direction every other moment. He could see that she and Ernest were both grave and silent, but absorbed in each other. Godfrey was temperate by nature and habit, but to-night he could eat nothing, and as he drank off glass after glass of champagne his talk grew faster, his laugh louder, his restless glances up the table more frequent, until Elspeth wondered what was the matter with him, and Mrs. Thornhill from the other end of the table watched him with anxious disapproval. As he was leading Elspeth from the room her mother stopped her, said she looked tired and had better not join in the next dance. So Godfrey was turning away, when a hand, whose touch he knew, sent a thrill through him.

"If you are not engaged for this dance, I will give it you instead of the waltz we missed," said Mary, with almost a pleading face.

They returned to the ball-room and joined in the galop; but they had not gone once round the room before Mary stopped him. "I think I am too tired to dance," said she tremulously; and he led her into the conservatory and leant against the framework of the door in front of her while she sank down on a low ottoman.

"You are not tired?" she began.

"No," he replied.

"You are angry with me?"

"No. What right have I to be angry? When you fancied that

my unwelcome attentions to you might be remarked, you did right in seizing the chance of repelling me openly."

"You are mistaken; indeed you are. Is it likely that I should dare to offend *you*, after last night?" she whispered.

He laughed. "You need not pretend to be afraid of me. Your dislike cannot prevent your seeing that I am a gentleman."

"I don't dislike you. I had promised Ernest. He—he has just asked me to be his wife."

Godfrey turned cold, and shivered as he heard her; but he neither looked up nor spoke: there was that in her tone which told she had accepted him. At last she touched his hand and said in a timid voice:

"Don't look like that; you frighten me. It cannot matter to you; you are engaged to Elspeth."

"Not matter!" said he, hoarsely. "No, not more than life itself matters to me. You cannot pretend you don't know that I love you. Why do you talk of my engagement, when you know that I was led into that by a trick—that I might be kept from you?" Mary started violently. "Yes, yes, I know that now. Heaven knows why, but your mother wanted to keep me from you——"

"You do know why," she interrupted. "How could I, with a blight on my life——"

"But you are going to marry Ernest?"

"But—but," she began with hesitation, "but he knows more than you do, and he will love me all the same."

"And do not I love you?" cried Godfrey, flinging himself on the ottoman beside her and looking into her eyes with an overmastering vehemence that frightened her. "A smile from you makes my senses reel, every tear I see you shed scalds me like fire. You pull at my heart-strings with every word you say, and when you touch me I know not where I am or what I'm doing. I tell you, Mary, if you cared for a man's love, you could no more resist me, to give yourself to a feather-headed, light-hearted, impulsive boy like Ernest, than you could prefer starvation to the wealth of a queen. Oh, how can you be so hard to me?" he concluded piteously.

"Hush," she whispered, afraid of this outburst being heard. "You should not talk like that, Mr. Godfrey: you have no right to. This is not love; it is an infatuation, and worth nothing."

"How dare you say that?" said he, rising. "How dare you presume to judge a passion you cannot feel! How can you sit there, and shrink, and shiver, without one touch of pity for the suffering you have caused me?"

"Because I know that a passion like yours is a selfish, cruel thing, more to be dreaded than anything else in the world," said she, firmly. "When you were gentle and kind, I respected you, I was sorry if I hurt you; but when you are like this, you make me sick with terror."

She was white and trembling; and as Godfrey looked up, bewildered and amazed by the dread with which his words had filled her, he struggled to conquer his own emotion.

"I did not mean to frighten you," said he at last. "I am excited to-night, I think, and not quite master of myself. I will not talk—like this again. I would not willingly have given you pain: I think you know that."

He was subdued now, and he began to put on his glove. She got up and walked quickly towards the door. Godfrey followed, but as he did so he caught sight once more of a face outside, peering through the plants and the steaming glass; no eyes that were not keen and well on the alert would have seen it at all; but Godfrey's attention was alive that night. He knew that there was a spy at work, *watching*. Was he watching Mary Dixon? At the door she turned to him impulsively; her tone was softer than her words:

"Mr. Godfrey, I have been hard to you, but I cannot help it. I am sorry, for you have been very kind to me."

He drew her arm through his with some incoherent commonplace, to take her to Mrs. Underwood.

"Now, will you do something that I want you to do, Mr. Godfrey?"

"Anything. You know that," said he in a low voice.

"Go and make your peace with Mrs. Thornhill, and devote yourself for the rest of the evening to Elspeth."

He gave her a sharp look of reproach. Then "All right," said he after a moment's pause. But there was just one point on which he felt he must be satisfied first.

Giving up Mary to a partner, finding Elspeth and engaging her for the next dance but one, Godfrey went out by the front door, so that the man who was watching might not see him coming. He wanted to discover who it really was, and so set that suspicion, which he had caught up, at rest one way or the other.

Stealthily making his way round to the conservatory, the figure of a man, standing there to peep in, was plainly to be seen. He heard Godfrey's steps, took alarm, disappeared among the evergreens, and tore away round to the back of the house. Godfrey gave chase, and caught his man crouched behind the water-butt.

"You let me alone, sir. Who is it? I wasn't doing nothing," said a lad's voice, which Godfrey thought he knew.

"Who the deuce are you?" cried Godfrey, angrily.

"I'm only Dod, sir, one of the grooms. Why, it's—it's young Mr. Mayne, I do believe!" added the speaker, straightening himself in amazement.

Godfrey, in disgust, put his hand in his pocket.

"Please sir, I was only peeping in to have a look at the company and the dancing: and I humbly ask your pardon, sir; but I thought it was the butler after me. I'm sure I meant no harm."

"No, of course not, Dod ; I'm sorry to have given you a fright ; but when I saw you rushing away like that, of course I took you for—for a thief," said Godfrey, enraged at his mistake. "Here's something for the run you've given me. Good-night."

"But it's my belief," commented Dod, to the other servants, when he related this adventure with much stress upon young Mr. Mayne's excited manner, "that it must have been—champagne."

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. MAYNE'S NIGHT ALARM.

WHEN Godfrey returned indoors, crestfallen and angry, he took a few minutes to recover himself before seeking Elspeth : who was in high good humour. Although not a very good dancer, her pretty looks had got her plenty of partners, and as her attachment to Godfrey only grew strong in the absence of any other excitement, she had enjoyed the evening unrestrainedly, pleasantly occupied with listening to the compliments of other young men—for Elspeth was the type of the innocent-eyed girl to whom men pay them. So she and Godfrey got on quite well together through the Lancers, which was her favourite dance, and then he set about the more difficult and less pleasing task of propitiating his future mother-in-law.

Those wall-flowers see such a lot, between the intervals of scandal and refreshments. Mrs. Thornhill must have seen much more than was good for any of them, he felt sure, as she glared at him icily to see that he was perfectly sober and answered his civil commonplaces with tightly-drawn lips. But he had perfect command over himself now, and he kept his eyes stoically away from that one little flitting, floating figure that, whether dancing or walking, most attracted the eyes of all the room. He divided his time for the rest of the evening between the frigid Mrs. Thornhill who, in the course of conversation, asked him if he had ever thought of joining the Band of Hope, and said she thought it was a very good thing, and Elspeth, who felt a glow of pride in him as she acknowledged best waltzer present.

Then his father came up and said he was going to take Mary home and was Godfrey coming.

"No, I'll stay and see Mrs. Thornhill home, if she will allow me," said the reformed young man dutifully. He was in the hall as Mary passed to the front-door on Ernest's arm, stopping for him to arrange about her head the wrap, made of an Indian shawl bordered with gold fringe and marabout trimming, which made her look, Godfrey thought, as he indulged his eyes with one long gaze, like a princess out of the Arabian Nights. Then he went back to reality and his duty, and in the bracing atmosphere of the vicar's wife and daughters, easily kept his fevered thoughts in check. He drove back to the Vicarage with them in the hired carriage—for they did not keep a close one.

The Vicar met them at the door, with the sublime gravity of manner he wore when he had been startled out of a doze. As Godfrey paused to exchange a few words with Matilda and Elspeth, Mrs. Thornhill drew her husband aside and rapidly made some communication to him. When the doomed young man advanced to say good-night, the Vicar spoke in an ominously soft voice :

"Can you come over to-morrow morning early, Godfrey? I have to go to Keighley at ten, and on Monday we start for Coniston, and I particularly want to speak to you first."

"Won't to-night do, Mr. Thornhill? I don't know whether I could be here so early," said Godfrey, who wanted to get it over, knowing that something particular is generally something unpleasant.

"Very well," said the Vicar after a moment's pause. "Will you come into the study?"

The Vicar's evening manner, when he was tired with his day's work in the parish, was never one to encourage a wandering sheep; but when he had firmly insisted on sitting up far into the night, alternately dozing and waking up to feel chilly, waiting for the return of his wife and daughters from a festivity of which he at heart disapproved, his manner was calculated to induce the sheep to turn his back to the fold and run the other way. So that Godfrey's proposal had a touch of Marcus Curtius' heroism.

They went into the great bare-looking study, and the two girls, who knew papa's bland voice, felt a pang of pity for the victim as they heard the door close.

"I shouldn't like to think, Godfrey," began the Vicar very gently, looking up at the opposite wall, as he did when he was preaching, "that your father's son was anything but honourable."

"I hope not, Mr. Thornhill," replied Godfrey, playing with his glove, and seeing that he was likely to enjoy himself.

"But do you think that you are behaving quite rightly, quite as you should do, to my little daughter?"

"To Elspeth? How do you mean, sir?"

"I think you must know; I may say I see that you do know. I don't want to be severe with you. I have been among the first to notice the great improvement, if I may use the expression, in you lately, the new manliness you have shown. I had begun to congratulate myself on being about to confide the happiness of one of my children to a man whom I would myself have chosen for the trust. But now—I have seen signs, and my wife has seen signs, little Elspeth herself has guessed something too, that this change in you is not the result of her influence; nor, as far as I can see, of the thought of marriage with her."

"But if the change in me is for the better, surely it is for her advantage, whatever influence it may be due to," returned Godfrey.

"Not quite, in this case, I think. At least I should not feel justified in trusting my daughter for life to a man whom I suspected

at the time to be strongly under the influence of—another woman." The last words were so low that the young man had almost to guess at them.

There was a pause. Then the Vicar looked at him for the first time.

"I don't think you can say I am too hard upon you, Godfrey. I don't want to preach to you about faith and loyalty, and what a man owes to the young woman he has asked to be his wife. I am quite sure that, if my suspicions are correct, you have not yielded to temptation without making many a sermon of that kind to yourself, without struggles and—perhaps—prayers. I know how a beautiful girl, who dresses in the fashion, and who has been used to a great deal of attention, makes a simple little country lass seem very tame—especially to young men. But you must have known your danger, if you have indeed been in danger, and I cannot acquit you of blame in not making stronger efforts to escape it. Perhaps I ought to have spoken to you before, but it is the sort of accusation a man naturally shrinks from until he is quite sure."

There was another pause, a longer one; then the young man raised his head.

"I have been to blame, Mr. Thornhill," said he, candidly. "And—you are right—I've suffered for it. I've been under—an infatuation. There were reasons, which I cannot tell you, which made escape more difficult than you think. She was not to blame," he resumed quickly, as the Vicar looked round. "When she guessed, she was indignant. So you may be satisfied—I shall be well punished. Infatuation over, and engagement broken—at the same time."

He got up restlessly, but the Vicar signed to him to sit down again. "One minute, Godfrey," said he, less sternly. "You say your infatuation is over."

"Yes, it is, sir."

"And you wish your engagement to be broken?"

"That is not my wish. I understood it to be your decision."

"Was the wish father to the thought, Godfrey?"

"On my honour, no. I have lived in a fever lately; I want to get back my health and my peace. I have had thoughts, as you know, sir, of obtaining some post in London, under Government; I shall now do so, if possible, and go away to begin a manlier life than the useless and aimless one I have led here. Yet at the moment of beginning to work, the object of work is taken away from me. Do you think a return to peace is likely to follow?"

"If you mean that as a threat that you intend to let yourself go and lead a disorderly life, once the restraint of your engagement is removed, I can only think my daughter has had a lucky escape from a man of so little self-control, Godfrey."

"I did not mean that. I have neither the wish nor the intention

to lead a disorderly life; I have never had yet. But I could set to work with more heart if I had still the prospect that it would not long be a lonely one."

"Elspeth is not the only girl in the world," suggested the Vicar.

"The only other I should have cared to marry is engaged," replied Godfrey steadily.

"Look here, Godfrey," said the Vicar after a short pause: "You have been frank in this matter, and I don't wish to be hard or unjust to you. You say you are going away. Now we are all going to the lakes for a month. Suppose we allow the matter to rest in abeyance: there shall be no formal breaking-off of the engagement, but let the correspondence drop for that time. I will settle it with Elspeth. If you leave Croxham before the end of next week—that must be a strict condition—I shall understand that you are in earnest about wishing to keep on the engagement. And if, when we return at the end of the month, you write and satisfy me that you are anxious to keep your faith loyally to her, the engagement shall go on as before. If you cannot satisfy me or yourself of that, why, my little daughter will have to shed a few tears that a more constant wooer would have spared her, and the matter will be at an end. You had better come over as usual to-morrow; but I think I must ask you not to make a long tête-à-tête with Elspeth, and to let me break this matter to her as seems best to me."

They both rose, and Godfrey left the Vicarage a good deal impressed by the Vicar's justice and unexpected leniency. He walked through the avenue on his way back to the Abbey in a state of more sobriety of mind than he had been in for weeks. That acquiescence of his in the decision both of Mr. Thornhill and Mary herself, that his love for the latter was a wicked infatuation, made it treacherously easy for him to look upon it, after the refrigerating society of the Vicar and his wife, as a folly to be easily crushed—if that blow of her engagement to Ernest had not yet quite killed it.

Then arose the thought of her danger. That the bringing down of this detective from Scotland Yard by Sir William Hunt, did somehow menace Mary with danger, Godfrey felt all too sure of—though he was unable to foresee precisely in what manner, or what shape it would take. Well, if he could not be at hand to watch over her himself, he must hand over that care to her future husband. But he had more than a week to stay at home yet—and who knew what might come to pass in that time?

The disagreeable suspicion, spoken of as having arisen in Godfrey's mind during the interview he had been a witness to between Sir William and the detective officer, was this: that the latter was no other than the artist-lodger at the farm—Mr. Cattermole.

The suspicion was more than disagreeable; it was hideous. Had this man, an acute adept in all the tricks and turns of the criminal law, placed himself in that close contiguity to the Abbey, passing

himself off as an inoffensive artist, for the purpose of keeping a watch over Mary, or her mother, or both of them? If so they must be already safe in his toils; no escape could remain for them; whenever he chose to put out his capturing hand they must yield to it. Godfrey grew hot at the thought.

The more he dwelt upon it, the stronger grew his opinion that this suspicion was correct. He had not seen enough of the man to recognise his person, but he had thought he recognised the voice. When it was raised somewhat above a whisper, Godfrey had been struck with its tone of softness, and began wondering whose it was and where he had heard it: and there flashed upon his mind in answer, It is that of the artist, Cattermole.

He recalled the little episode related to him by Nancy Wilding: of her seeing a rough sketch of the likeness of Mary Dixon, growing under their lodger's hands; he had said it was not a likeness of any Miss Dixon, but of a lady he had met abroad, and had since lost sight of. What could this mean?

Terribly uneasy, he turned aside from the front gates of the Abbey, and made his way round to the farm-house, with what purpose he could hardly have told, unless it was the vague wish of ascertaining whether the artist had been abroad that night. The earth was damp and fresh, one or two sharp showers having fallen during the evening.

As Godfrey halted before the farm, looking up at it, the church clock struck the half hour after two. Of course everybody had been in bed for hours!—and what good had he done by coming there?

At that same moment, the curtain was suddenly pulled aside from an end window, which he knew to be Nancy's, and her head appeared at it. Her room was at the opposite end of the farm to the room occupied by the lodger, which joined the Abbey. After taking a look at Godfrey, standing there in the rather watery moonlight in his thin, light overcoat, she withdrew, and closed the curtain.

"I'll ask Nancy: she won't mind," thought Godfrey: and he took up some gravel and flung it at the window.

It did not bring forth any response. Godfrey threw again.

At this Nancy pulled back the curtain and looked down. Godfrey made a sign to her to open the window; and she obeyed him.

"Good gracious, Master Godfrey, whatever do you want at this time?" she exclaimed in a whisper. "Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter; it's all right. I say, Nancy," he continued, in a voice as cautiously low as her own, "I want you to tell me whether your lodger has been abroad to-night."

"What do you want to know for?" returned Nancy, womanlike.

"Never you mind that: not for any harm, you may be sure," returned Godfrey. "Was Mr. Cattermole out late this evening? Come! don't keep me here all night, Nancy."

"Well, sir, he was, if you must know. He went out at ten o'clock, which was very late for him, just as we were all going to bed,

and carried the key of the door with him. Mother said she thought he must be going to take sketches by moonlight."

"What time did he come in? Is he come in?" added Godfrey.

"He came in, but I can't tell you what time it was, Master Godfrey. I had been asleep when I heard him come creeping up the stairs and go along the passage to his room; and I have been asleep again since."

"It was he with Sir William, sure enough," mentally decided Godfrey. "Thank you, Nancy," he said; "I'm sorry to have disturbed you. By the way, what was it that you came to the window to look for? Me?"

"None of your nonsense, Master Godfrey. It was Dick. I am so uneasy about him after what he did last night at the Abbey, that I can't sleep soundly as usual; the least noise startles me and I'm wide awake in a moment. Father gave him a good stroke or two this morning, and mother and I have talked to him; but, to tell you the truth, sir, we can't feel sure of him: poor Dick's reason is not like other people's, you know. So, hearing your footsteps just now, Master Godfrey, I was afraid they were Dick's—afraid he might have got out again."

"What could have moved him to play up that prank last night, I wonder?" cried Godfrey.

"I *can't* imagine what," replied the young woman energetically. "The more I've tried to get it out of him, the surer he baffles me. I can only think his poor weak head must have picked up a notion that his idol, Miss Dixon, was in some danger, and he climbed in at the schoolroom window to see that she was safe. He is not half so tractable as he was before Mr. Cattermole came: he makes so much of Dick."

"Well, good night, Nancy—or rather good morning," said Godfrey. "Shut your window and get to sleep again. Pleasant dreams!"

In a few seconds, Godfrey was round at the Abbey entrance, ringing gently at the door. Mr. Mayne appeared in his dressing-gown, rather cross.

"When I offered to sit up to let you in, Godfrey, I did not think you were going to keep me up for a week," he grumbled. "You said you should follow me directly."

"I am very sorry, father. I went into the Vicarage, and Mr. Thornhill kept me talking. You ought to have gone to bed, and left Hawkins up."

"I should not have rested if I had gone," again grumbled Mr. Mayne. "The fact is, my wife is in so nervous a state to-night that she can't sleep herself, or let anybody else sleep."

"What is she nervous about?" asked Godfrey.

"I can't quite make it out," said Mr. Mayne. "It seems that Lydia, who was sitting up to undress Mary, went in to her mistress's dressing-room for something or other she wanted, and heard sighs

and sobs in the bed-room. Running in, she found Mrs. Mayne in a most nervous and excited condition, as if she had seen a ghost. Lydia asked what had frightened her; and, to her horror, my wife asked if the house was haunted. Lydia enquired what she had seen, and was for calling to Hawkins and Mrs. Garner, and having the rooms searched. But her mistress refused: it might have been only her fancy, she said, and ordered Lydia to say nothing about it. The girl, however, was frightened, and spoke to me as soon as I came home."

"I wonder what time the fright happened?" said Godfrey.

"It was a little before one o'clock, Lydia says, that she went to the dressing-room. We got home not very long after one. It does not matter what time it happened, Godfrey."

"If there was anything in it more than fancy, the time might be a guide to our finding it out."

"What, have you taken to believe in ghosts?"

"Ghosts are at the bottom of a good many things, father," returned Godfrey, drily.

"Well, for goodness' sake don't persuade your mother she has seen a ghost, or I should have no peace at all," said his father, as he turned to the library. "I shall get a book, for I can't sleep."

Godfrey had lighted his candle and was crossing the hall towards the staircase when, glancing down the passage which led to the refectory, with the nervous alertness produced by his late investigations, he fancied he saw a perpendicular line of light, and that he felt at the same time a draught of air. He went down the passage and found, as he had expected, the refectory door ajar.

"Confounded carelessness! In a house where we seem to be most of us at the proper pitch for a fright, if the wind were to blow a door to in the middle of the night I think some of them would lose their wits altogether."

He was just going to shut it, when a new idea made him change his mind and enter the room. One of the windows was open. He went up to it, looked out, but could not see or hear any signs of an intrusion outside. There was a narrow flower-bed with nasturtiums and china-asters running along under the window. Then he turned to examine the room, and on the floor just inside, the light of the candle plainly showed the print of a man's dirty boot. There was a succession of smaller marks as far as the door, from the shape of which it was evident that the intruder had advanced on tip-toe. Godfrey's thoughts turned upon Mr. Dick.

Outside the door the marks ceased. Godfrey looked carefully at the mat outside; but there was on it only one footprint and not any sign of boots having been rubbed on it. To the right was a house-maid's cupboard under the staircase. Godfrey opened it, and was instantly blinded by something flung over his face; he made a lunge forward, however, hitting his hand against the wall and his head against a shelf. There was a clatter of pails and brooms, into which

he had walked, and the cloth which covered his eyes fell on to the candle and put it out. He backed quickly out, fastening the door.

Finding his way back to the table in the hall, he felt for the matches and relit his candle. Then he returned to the cupboard. It could only be fastened from the outside, and the fastening was undisturbed; so that no one had escaped in his absence. He re-opened the door and searched the long slanting cupboard from end to end; there was no one there, and no appearance of anyone having been there. A duster on the floor, which he recognised by its smell of paraffine as the one which had been over his face, had evidently fallen on him on his first entrance from a high upper shelf, on which he saw oil-cans and lamp-glasses. He stepped back out of the cupboard, fastened the door again and re-entered the refectory. There were no return marks of feet, there was no one hidden in the room, no one crouching in the passage. He shut the window and left the room, locking the door and taking the key away with him.

He was creeping slowly along the passage, examining the floor at every step, when a woman's shrill shriek from above made him fly to the staircase. A door opened immediately above, and his father came out of the library. At the same moment, Godfrey caught sight of a woman's figure flitting along the upper corridor.

"Laura!" cried out Mr. Mayne. "Mary!" cried out Godfrey; both speaking at the same time.

They hurried upstairs to Mrs. Mayne's room. Mr. Mayne ran in, and his son followed without ceremony.

Mrs. Mayne was sitting up in bed, a large woollen shawl flung over her shoulders, and supported in the arms of her daughter. Mary, who had taken off her ball dress and put on a grey-coloured dressing-gown, was standing by the bedside, wiping her mother's face with a handkerchief. Both were pale and trembled; but Mary was quite self-possessed, while the elder lady was speechless and shuddering.

"What on earth is all this?" exclaimed the bewildered husband.

"Poor mamma!" cried Mary, turning calmly to them. "It is I who have given her a fright now. I thought I would just come to see how she was. My knock at the door she did not hear; and when I came in she screamed out, taking me, I think, for a ghost."

"It must be all the fault of that silly Lydia," returned Mr. Mayne. "She absolutely put the question to me—had the Abbey ghosts in it? Ghosts indeed! I should have thought you possessed better sense, my dear, than to be disturbed at any such nonsense," he added, soothingly, regarding his trembling and terror-stricken wife.

"I think I had better sleep with her to-night, Mr. Mayne, for I am quite sure she would never let you have any rest, and that would disturb her still more," said Mary.

"Do so, my dear, if you think that is best for her. I can sleep on the sofa in the dressing-room."

"No, no," said Mary quickly, "that is too near; you would be listen-

ing all night long and get no rest. Why not sleep in the Swallow-room? The bed there is always kept aired and ready."

"Very well," said the compliant easy man. "It is rather far off this room, though."

"Oh, not at all," returned Mary. "I could run for you in half a minute if you were wanted here. But you will not be; I am sure mamma will sleep ——"

Mary stopped suddenly, and her face changed. For the first time she had caught sight of Godfrey. He had stayed behind near the door, and occupied himself with making searching glances round the room. Lydia was the next to come in, looking nearly as frightened as her mistress.

"Do not stay, please, Mr. Godfrey," said Mary to him. "The sight of so many people here only makes mamma more nervous. Lydia, we shall not want you; you can go to bed. It was my coming in unexpectedly that startled mamma again and caused her to cry out," she concluded to the maid.

But Godfrey remembered he had seen a figure he knew to be Mary's flying along the corridor towards her mother's room after the shriek. Therefore he concluded that whoever or whatever it was that frightened Mrs. Mayne at first, had frightened her a second time.

He had glanced in the corner between the chest of drawers and the wall, at the window, the wardrobe, the curtains of the huge old-fashioned mahogany bedstead, and he was stooping to look under the sofa when Mary first saw him. But he did not go at her bidding. In point of fact, Godfrey's mind was filled with Dick Wilding, and the new tricks that young man might be up to.

The chamber was a large one, with two doors; one opened into the corridor, facing the window; the other into the dressing-room. Mary had not moved from her position by the bed. Mr. Mayne advanced, wanting to say a few private words to his wife, and would have put Mary aside; but she would not be put aside; she would not stir. Godfrey, his suspicions alert, though he knew not of what, noted this, and began to think she must be concealing something.

It struck him that he might as well examine the dressing-room, and he was moving towards it when Mary left the bed with a hurried movement and placed herself in his way.

"Please do not trouble to look further now," she said; "you disturb mamma."

Godfrey turned sharply back, and went to the side of the bed where she had been standing. Then he saw what it was that she had been hiding.

His eyes met hers, for she also had returned to the same spot: and Mary knew that he had seen the print of a man's hand, soiled with damp, black mould upon the white counterpane.

(To be continued.)

GODMOTHER DOROTHY.

I THINK my story began at the moment when my hat box was bundled out of the van of the London train at the Crossbridge station. It was certainly before the extraction of my second portmanteau, for I was too anxious about that to pay any attention to the fact that a porter at my elbow had made several attempts to complete an observation beginning "Beg pardon, sir,"—didn't discover that he intended the remark for me, in fact, for some little time—"The lady is in the waiting-room, sir. If you'll please step this way."

Lady? What lady? I wasn't expecting any lady, and so I told him; but when the portmanteau was found at last, and the other portmanteau, and the helmet-case, and the sword-case, and the Overland trunk, and the hamper, and the uniform-case, and the sticks and rugs, and the train had moved off, I turned to find him and myself the only visible beings on the platform, and to hear him still persuasively reiterating, "If you would kindly step this way, sir. There don't seem to be any other party about, that the lady might be expecting." And he looked feebly along the down line and into the signal-box, and back into my face again for a suggestion.

"Whoever she expects it's quite certain not to be me," I assured him. "Now suppose you bring these things along to wherever the Rocksedge train starts from."

He obeyed under an evident burden of misgivings. "Military gent, walks lame, straight figure, grey moustache; odd if there's two of them about," I heard him murmur to himself as he piled his truck. "Rocksedge, sir? That's where the lady is going to," he said, lifting his handles and trundling off with his load.

"What's she like?" I asked with some curiosity, as I walked beside my possessions to a distant end of the platform: "an old lady?"

"Not an *old* lady, sir," very positively.

"A young lady, then?"

"I shouldn't exactly call her young either, sir," extinguishing a rising glimmer of interest in my mind. I dismissed him, and felt for my cigar-case, smiling to myself at the idea his words conveyed. The sort of woman who is decidedly not old but can't be called young—I had a vision of her on the spot. She wears a tailor suit, her figure being the last spar of youthfulness to which she can cling. A grizzled fringe peeps from beneath a hat of a severe build, and she is also addicted to further emphasising the hard outline of cheek and chin by tight collars and brilliant scarves. Her boots are a strong point, and are usually worth looking at—instep and ankle know no age. I had got so far in my fancy sketch while preparing to light up, when I beheld my porter back again.

"I ask your pardon, sir, I really *do*! But the lady she is that positive, that just for the satisfying of her mind if you *would* step round, I'd take it as a kindness."

I replaced my cigar case, amused in spite of myself, but provoked also. Crossbridge is a little deserted strip of a platform, at the junction of two lines of railway. We had it all to ourselves except for two market-women, who were slumbering over their baskets on the bench outside the one little waiting-room. "The lady" whoever she might be, and I, would have practically an unbroken tête-à-tête till the arrival of my train; a trying position for me, who am emphatically not a society man. I compromised.

"If the lady likes to come and look at me, she will find me at the book-stall; I am going to get a paper," and off I walked as briskly as a recent attack of rheumatism would allow.

I found the stall nearer to the waiting-room door than I had supposed, and heard the rustle of a gown almost at my elbow as I unfolded the largest daily paper in the world, and from its cover took a view in return of the lady who was so desirous of appropriating me. She was retreating hastily, the porter following, uttering regrets in a gruff whisper. "But," I heard her say, "I told you an *elderly* gentleman. *Quite* elderly." I looked again, and my fancy picture vanished into thin air. It no more resembled her than, in my opinion, her description did me. First of all she was clad in a big mantle that draped her in graceful, glossy folds. Then she wore a bonnet—I don't commit myself to the style or material—but it was dark and close, and the strings marked the outline of a soft pink cheek, and tied themselves up snugly under a round, white, determined chin. The mouth above was a little square resolute one too, and explained the porter's blind zeal in her service. I couldn't see the colour of her eyes, but they were dark and soft, and in place of the grizzled fringe with which my fancy had endowed her, wavy bands of brown hair, possibly sprinkled with grey, were brushed back from a low, white forehead. Altogether I almost caught myself wishing for a moment I *had* been the right man.

I wished it completely and unfeignedly a moment later, when her travelling companion joined her at the waiting-room door. This was simply the loveliest young creature I had ever set eyes on. A slip of a girl, at the "bud" stage of existence, with great sapphire eyes, a mass of paly gold hair, and the tints of a wild rose. She was well got-up in a neat grey travelling suit, with a crimson knot at her throat, and a crimson band round her grey sailor hat, and she carried a little silky black dog in her slim, grey, long-gloved hands. She made a little confidential pantomime of despair when she beheld me, and the two retired within the doorway. I was so lost to all sense of propriety as to follow them. There was a big poster about cheap trips to the Fisheries hanging close to the door, and taking out pencil and an old envelope I began to note down carefully the terms on which I could

get five hours in London, with entrance to the Exhibition, eight hours' railway travelling included.

"Oh Auntie, what *are* we to do?" I heard a girlish voice exclaiming. "It's *too* bad of Colonel Wriothsesley! *Must* we wait here till the next train?"

"Certainly not," spoke a voice to match the chin; soft and round and resolute. "We can find our way alone; we—or he—must have made some mistake about the day. If only we can get anything in the shape of a carriage at Rocksedge!" Here another train came in, not ours, but it brought the two ladies to the door, as if there had been some faint possibility of the missing Colonel appearing from the other end of England. It was an opening for me, and I seized it.

"You are expecting Colonel Wriothsesley, I believe. He is a friend of mine. You may have heard him mention my name—Travers—Major Travers—if I can be of any service in his absence." She took a good look at me, as a sensible woman should; a cool, deliberate, considering gaze; then accepted the introduction frankly.

"I am a cousin of Colonel Wriothsesley—Mrs. Darsie Pierpoint—and was relying on him to meet me here and take us down to Rocksedge. This is a strange land to us, and I am not quite sure of being able to find my way to my own house when I get there—as I have been rash enough to take it without seeing it." I assured her of my intimate acquaintance with the place and its ways, and she ended by introducing "My niece, Miss Leyland," whereon the bud blushed as is not the wont of even buds to blush in these days.

We had a pleasant journey down, during which Mrs. Pierpoint explained that she had taken a cottage for a month at Rocksedge on Colonel Wriothsesley's recommendation, in search of quiet and sea-breezes; and I in turn told her how I came to be there. How I was in command of a detachment at Fort Limpet, a small military penitentiary, situated on a forlorn little spit of land at one end of the strip of pebbly beach along which Rocksedge extends its stucco lines of terraces and esplanades. "Then we are quite near neighbours," she was pleased to say, with a charming smile. "I believe my cottage, Tamarisk Lodge, is near the fort, quite away from the town. I hope you will come and see us soon."

I drove the ladies home in my trap, there being nothing on wheels procurable at Rocksedge without special notice, and received and accepted an invitation to luncheon for the next day.

"Something to write about to-night at least," I thought, when I retreated to my room that evening after mess to despatch my weekly letter to my regular correspondent, the widow of my late godfather, whom—at first in fun, and also partly to keep her position well before my own mind, and afterwards because I didn't quite know what else to call her—I had always addressed as "Godmother." I am, it is as well to explain at once, a creature of routine; my life is made up of little practices and habits, from which it is pain and grief to me to

depart; but the one to which I cling most fondly, and for the sake of which I am ready to throw overboard all the rest if need be, is my weekly letter to Godmother and her weekly reply to mine. Every Tuesday night have I opened my great shabby old leather writing-case—her present when I was starting for India more than twenty years ago—taken out her photograph and propped it up before me, and then addressing it, as it were, proceeded to pour out all the week's experiences, as I could have done to no living being beside, in the full confidence that Sunday evening would find her pondering over the last letter she had received from me, and answering it with the best of her sympathy. Delightful answers, full of fun, piquant gossip, personal and otherwise, and talk about myself and my concerns, touched with the lightest, most delicate finger. I am naturally a reserved man, reserved to unsociability. I can only make myself decently companionable by a strong and continuous effort, and no one can tell the relief it has been to pour out my thoughts to this half-known, shadowy confidant; as shadowy as her photograph, in a voluminous crinoline and flowing sleeves, taken before her marriage, and which was all I had ever had of her till she sent me a new one last year. We met once, for two days, at the time of her marriage with my godfather.

All my people were beyond measure wrathful with Lady Dolly, the little minx of a school girl who had bewitched him into marrying her, and so disposed effectually of all *my* prospects of heirship; prospects, I am bound to admit, of the most airy and baseless nature. They were so urgent that I should make my approaching departure for India an excuse for not being present at the wedding that I was stimulated to opposition, and started off to Yorkshire to present my congratulations in person, and offer my services as best man. Within half an hour after my arrival at the forlorn, out-at-elbows old castle, I had struck up a friendship with the little childish bride that was to last my life. She was so romantic in her devotion to her handsome, middle-aged bridegroom, so splendid in her scorn of any advantage that his wealth might bring her, and so determinedly loyal to my interests when it came to a question of settlements, that it is less than wonderful that she should touch my heart as no woman could before or since. The day after the wedding I sailed for India, and we never met again. When I came home on leave, my godfather was trying a voyage to Australia as a last remedy for his failing strength. And when I came home for good she was nursing her only brother, taking him from one German bath to another in a fruitless chase after health.

Somehow I did not regret the postponement of our meeting. My visionary Lady Dolly was very dear to me—so dear that on her behalf I felt an odd jealousy of the claims of the original. Just as the new Van der Weyde photograph, so like and yet so unlike my hoarded recollections, came upon me with a sort of shock. I had

become accustomed to the great speckled expanse of skirt, the mass of netted hair, and undistinguishable features of the old one, and looked with disfavour on the exquisite artistic finish of its rival, to whom I grudged its place. However, there it stood, while I covered page after page with matter trivial enough to anyone but Godmother Dorothy.

I made as amusing a story as I could of my meeting with Mrs. Darsie Pierpoint, and even essayed a word picture of pretty Miss May Leyland, which I guessed would bring me into dire disgrace. My godmother, good soul, oblivious of the years that had rolled over my head since we parted, had let slip in one of her later letters a hint of a certain romantic scheme in petto.

My godfather had remembered me handsomely beyond all expectation in his will, but the bulk of his property was naturally left to his wife for her lifetime. She in her childless widowhood had adopted a pretty penniless relation, "the sort of child I was myself," she wrote; and I knew what her frequent mention of May's goodness, and pretty ways, and general delightsomeness meant; and gave no sign in return. When I had finished my letter, I took up the photograph and examined it closely. A good, grave face, worn and lined by a long life of care and nursing, hair prematurely grey, rather quaintly dressed, and kind bright eyes, looking out from under heavy dark eyebrows. She wore a cap and a plain black gown, with a lace cape fastened by a big brooch, containing what was presumably godfather's likeness. "Do I look as old as *she* does?" I found myself asking, with quite a new anxiety. "She must have given up being young long before there was any need, surely. It is always the result of living with old people. Still, I wonder if in people's eyes—in a young girl's, for instance—I look the same."

I was punctual to the time named at Tamarisk Lodge next day. The drawing-room was empty, and I had time to look about me and note the traces of its occupants with approval. I don't mean that there was that litter of cheap china and rickety photograph stands, tawdry lace and sham bric-a-brac, with which some women deluge the place under the belief that it gives an artistic air to their surroundings; but the lodging-house furniture was veiled and draped in oriental silks and stuffs, there were fresh flowers about, and a side table with a supply of new books and magazines. A lovely water colour drawing stood on an easel in the proper light; there was a piano that did *not* look as if it came from the Rockledge circulating library and music-seller's; and lastly, leaning up against the wall was a violoncello, that grinned me a welcome from its every string. I was gazing amicably at it, thinking of a certain cherished household god of my own, and, I suppose, whistling involuntarily, for —

"Beethoven, C minor, No. 3," remarked Mrs. Pierpoint's voice behind me. "You don't mean to tell me you play the violin! I thought I saw something like its case when we came down yester-

day, but did not like to ask. That's May's 'cello. She will be here presently." Then in she came, fresh as a rose.

We had a dainty, well-served luncheon, that proved what an adept Mrs. Pierpoint must be in her manipulation of unpromising material, for they were entirely dependent on the local resources, she told me. They had not brought even a maid with them, and had not an acquaintance in the place, nor did they wish to make any. "What we want is *perfect* quiet, and Colonel Wriothesley promised me we should find it here." I was able to confirm the statement emphatically. "Miss Leyland is not out yet," she went on, as we strolled on the slopes of Tamarisk Lodge in a sunny half hour after luncheon, awaiting the arrival of my violin, which a servant had been despatched to Fort Limpet for. "And while she is under my care I am cautious about allowing her to make any acquaintance here." I had not the highest opinion of Rocksedge society myself, I intimated. "And—I hardly know how to put it graciously—but I would rather you did not introduce any of your friends at the fort to us. You are not offended, I hope?" I assured her I understood her position perfectly, and the tête-à-tête ended with May rushing out to announce Amati's arrival.

We had a glorious practice. The two ladies knew all my favourites as well as I did, and had piles of things, new and old, that it was a perfect feast for me to plunge into. Mrs. Pierpoint's music was something out of the common too. She played us "Chopin," while May poured out afternoon tea, and I let my cup get cold untasted as I listened. When we parted, Mrs. Pierpoint had given a half doubtful consent to my suggestion of a drive to Shingle Bay next day, and luncheon with me after, with an inspection of my collection of Indian curios to follow. We were to meet for a practice in any case before long, and a blissful vision of days to come stretched out before me as I took my way back to my quarters.

The days flew by with harmony on their wings: *how fast*, I hardly guessed, till I found with a start that Godmother Dorothy's letter had fallen due for once without my having counted the posts to its arrival. I was engaged to dine at Tamarisk Lodge that day. We had some music in the evening, and after that strolled out together on the terrace under the summer moon. May and her dog Scrap flitted about like elves in and out of the shrubbery paths below us, while Mrs. Pierpoint and I drifted into a conversation a trifle more personal and more freely expressed than was ever possible to me except by fits and starts and under favouring conditions. Mrs. Pierpoint was an easy woman to talk to; quick to comprehend a half-expressed thought, ready with an answer to an unspoken question.

I found myself telling her a great deal about myself, and learning very little about her in return. She had seen a great deal of the

world, and her life had been a sad one—that was all I gathered. *My* life had been a lonely one too, she divined instinctively—here, half unwittingly, I let Godmother Dorothy's name fall. It was followed by a sudden chill and silence, as if a cold mist from the sea had blown up to us. My companion indeed was shivering. "May! May!" she called, "come in. It is damp, the dew is falling." May obeyed, her wavy locks straightened and stiffened by the salt air, her cheeks rosy. We went back to the softly-lighted room and sipped our coffee and talked commonplace for a few minutes; then May disappeared, and her aunt sat down to the piano, as if to avoid any further speech. She sang song after song in the rose-tinted gloom,—sang them to me, every word, and I listened till my heart grew full, and my eyes wet, and the years seemed to roll their long length backwards, and, instead of the elderly bronzed old major I had left in my looking-glass that afternoon, I was the careless subaltern, with the world before me and a heartful of hopeless love for little Lady Dolly again.

May came skipping back with trim, neatly-coiled tresses, and an armful of songs with violin obbligato for me to try with her; but I excused myself and said adieu.

When I entered my room, there on the table lay a letter from my godmother, with the Paris postmark. An odd misgiving came over me as I opened it, but it was just the same as ever—amusing, friendly, sympathetic—with bright little comments on my bits of news.

"I utterly decline to be interested in your new friends," it ended. "I mistrust that wandering widow, without luggage or escort, and should not be surprised to hear that Colonel Wriothsesley knew no more about his charming cousin than I do. I must decidedly exercise my godmotherly privilege, and come down to look after you as soon as I can get free. The meeting at the station reads so very like a put up thing. Miss Leyland *may* be the sweetest bud that ever bloomed, but buds are not such harmless playthings as roses, remember. Good-bye, my dear boy. Take good care of yourself till the arrival of

"Your loving godmother,

"M. DOROTHEA CHAMPNEYS."

I laid the letter down, laughing to myself. There was an awkwardness, a sort of forced liveliness, in the whole of the last paragraph, very unlike the rest of the letter. It read as if godmother had felt obliged to say something when she had nothing good to say, and I fancied I detected a flash of mild spite in the reference to Miss Leyland that bore out the supposition. Poor dear godmother! If she only knew how indifferent I was to the charms of that dangerous little bud, except from an artistic point of view. As for Mrs. Pierpoint, *she* had only to be seen and known to dispose of all

criticism. As soon doubt that the stars are fire, in fact much sooner, than suspect her to be of a Brummagem origin. She was thoroughbred to the finger-tips: and I forthwith opened my letter-case and told Lady Dolly so indignantly, three posts before my letter was due.

Then, with a parcel of new music for excuse, I sallied forth to call at Tamarisk Lodge, and obtain material on which to form my opinion. I devised a few neat diplomatic little questions, that should extract sufficient particulars of the birth, parentage, and social position of my new friends to set godmother's doubts and—must it be confessed—my own likewise at rest for ever.

All sorts of ungracious little doubts, each light and harmless in itself as a single midge, buzzed through my mind in a distracting swarm. Chance observations of May's, nipped off unfinished by her aunt; small discrepancies of statement; even a cut-off corner of a piece of music where the name should have been: all joined in the ungracious murmur of suspicion that seemed to vex my ears.

After all, when I got there, May was alone and defenceless. "Auntie has a headache and is not up to music to-day," she explained. I expressed due regret.

"Where do you go when you leave Rocksedge?" I asked, casually, dusting my Amati tenderly with his silk handkerchief before reclosing his case. She hesitated.

"Home with Auntie, I think—I don't quite know."

"Home? Where is that?" I demanded, inquisitorially.

"In London. Won't you play this for me before you put Amati by?" she asked, hurriedly fluttering the leaves of the music.

"With pleasure," I replied, with small satire. "It is an arrangement for voice and piano. Which part shall I take?—My dear Miss Leyland," I went on, looking straight into her embarrassed face, "did I do wrong in asking that question? It was only in the hope that some day we might meet again."

She blushed deeper and deeper. "I did not know whether Auntie would like my telling you," she murmured.

"Then consider it unasked: only, like a good little girl, don't burden your soul with a fib by way of answer. Your aunt has assured me that she has not stayed in London for many a day."

May tossed her head and then looked saucily penitent.

"I'm not out yet, you see, and don't know what I ought to say when a gentleman asks my address with a view to future acquaintance. I'm sure I shall be happy enough to see you. It has made a great difference to our stay here, meeting you and Amati."

We parted friends. Only, as I took my way homewards, I did not feel exactly as if I had prospered greatly in my first steps towards the conversion of Lady Dorothy.

I met Mrs. Pierpoint that evening as I was smoking a lonely cigar on the Esplanade. As a rule she avoided the town, and I don't know what brought her there, though I won't swear that a

distant glimpse of a yellow Japanese parasol had not brought *me*. It was a still, warm-tinted evening, and the fishing-boats rocked on a glassy sea, the line of the net marking one long curve of ripples in the water. All the population of Rocksedge were congregated on the Esplanade, watching to see the net drawn in. The little brown, bare-legged children scrimmaged about on the wet pebbles below, and Scrap barked excitedly at them from the edge of the sea wall above.

Mrs. Pierpoint had chosen a seat apart, and welcomed me with a faint smile. She had come to town to try and get rid of her headache, but I might stay, if I did not mind a dull companion. So we sat and talked softly together in the still clear evening, and when she rose to go home I went with her.

"May tells me she made a foolish mystery of our plans when she saw you this morning. I was very angry with her, silly girl! The fact is, we don't quite know ourselves where we shall stay in town. It is an odd time to be there, but May has a chance of getting some violin lessons, and we can stay on to get a peep at the autumn exhibitions. When I have succeeded in finding rooms I will send you our address, if you care to have it."

"Colonel Wriothsley could help you in your quest. Nobody knows town better than he. I expect him here in a day or two."

I didn't make that speech, I'll swear. It was some demon, who got possession of me for the moment and spoke with diabolic significance through my voice. I saw—and oh, how I wished I *hadn't* seen—her start and colour, as no mention of an ancient and respectable relative need cause any woman, conscience-free, to blush. I blurted out some common-place stupidity in haste, to save her the embarrassment of a reply, but the walk homewards was ended in silence, except for a few forced fragments of conversation. When we parted she gave me no invitation to enter, nor did her eyes meet mine as she held out her hand. "Shall we see you to-morrow?" and to my fancy there was a wistful apologetic ring in her words: "You promised May to come. She will be disappointed, and wonder——"

"Thank you, I will come."

"In the afternoon I shall be glad to see you," and she bowed and let the gate close gently on me, while I—as miserable and conscience smitten as if I had been found out in anything—I turned slowly homewards to compose another letter to Lady Dorothy.

This is what I said:

"I can only answer your anxieties about me by the truth. The truth about myself, I mean. Perhaps you have already guessed somewhat of it from the letter that this follows. As for Mrs. Pierpoint, I am as far from knowing anything about her as I was then. You hinted, half in joke, that she was not what she pretends to be—plainly spoken, that means that she is an adventuress, of whom a

wise man would keep clear. I think you are right; at least I have been trying all day to convince myself that you are wrong, and have succeeded in discovering—what? That if she is an impostor, instead of unmasking her, I, for my part, am ready to turn round and make common cause with her against you and the rest of the world—if she'll have me for an accomplice. The murder's out, and I can but throw myself on your mercy. It is somewhat of a relief to have my own folly set clear and plain before my eyes, and to have fathomed its depths. Dorothy—kindest and wisest of fairy godmothers! you have helped me before this out of many a difficulty—out of many more than you ever suspected; but here even you are powerless. You are indignant with me, and ashamed of my folly? So ought I to be, and the worst symptom is I am no such thing. Here I am at five-and-forty, a steady-going old veteran, hopelessly in love with a woman, not young nor beautiful (as beauties go—I have my own opinion on the subject), of whom I know absolutely nothing, except that she has a brilliant touch on the pianoforte, a delicious contralto voice, and a laugh like somebody I met, years ago, down in Yorkshire.

"No, I am not ashamed, and I decline to be pitied.

"What is to come of it?' you ask. I have not an idea. Of one thing only I am certain—believe it or not—Mrs. Pierpoint is in total ignorance of my folly, and shall remain so. She thinks, indeed, that I am unjustifiably curious about her past life, and there it ends. Perhaps the advent of Colonel Wriothesley may frighten her away—I devoutly hope it may. If not, I shall keep discreetly apart from Tamarisk Lodge till their stay here comes to an end. Not from one remaining spark of prudence or common sense; but simply because Mrs. Pierpoint cares not one whit for me, and I don't want to provoke her into telling me so, as I should most assuredly do if I gave myself the chance."

I added a few more lines that I am afraid hardly bettered my case, and finding that there was time to catch the night's post, sent my servant off with it, feeling that now for certain I had burned my ships behind me.

May and her aunt welcomed me as usual, when I paid my promised visit next day. My Amati had already established a special corner for itself beside the 'cello, and I wondered what excuse I could make for carrying it away with me. We began upon music directly. May indulged me with Haydn and all my other favourites, and then we tried one thing after another in a steady, business-like manner, quite different to our former idle dallying. May seemed to notice it. "This is severe," she presently remarked, laughing; "sing something, Auntie." But Mrs. Pierpoint shook her head and walked away to the window, where she sat gazing meditatively out at the distant sea, while May accompanied me in "To Anthea."

I'm afraid my performance was not as correct as it might have been

had I not been absorbed in watching the changes of expression that drifted across that handsome, inscrutable face at the window. I caught her eyes fixed on me, too, once. It was when May had left the piano and returned to her 'cello. I liked to watch her as she played. With her long white arms and fingers, her intent luminous eyes, and her loose rippling hair, May always reminded me of some angel making music I had seen in a church window; and I sat admiring till I seemed to feel Mrs. Pierpoint's glance rest on me, and turned to intercept a curious look. A queer, wistful, yearning, heart-sick look that was gone in a flash, and left her smiling content on us. One more and one more—we had got amongst the duets now—and then I said I must go.

"Only this before we part," begged May, holding up one of Reissiger's trios. "Come, Auntie!"

"Can you two *never* get on for five minutes without my assistance?" she demanded, rather impatiently, rising and joining us however. Well, it all came to an end at last, and I left, but had not courage to bring away the violin, though no hint of further practice was given.

I kept away for three days, and on the fourth, as I was leaving the orderly-room, I came full upon Colonel Wriothesley.

He is in the Engineers, and had come down to inspect the fort. It took up the rest of the morning and some time after luncheon. I listened with nervous interest to the Colonel's gentle little stream of small-talk, hoping against hope that some allusion to his friends here might escape him—in vain. We discussed Rocksedge, its visitors, its merits as a seaside resort and as a military station, and still no mention of his cousins came. At last, heart-sick and desperate, I bluntly asked—

"You were coming down here one day last month, were you not, Colonel?"

"Who? I? Never rightly knew where the place was till last week, I am ashamed to say," was the answer that crushed my last hopes. Yet to make certainty more sure I persisted.

"Do you know any lady down here of the name of Pierpoint? Darsie Pierpoint?"

"Pierpoint? No. I've heard the name somewhere. Pierpoint—? There was a Pierpoint—a young fellow—drowned on his way to India, I remember. Nice fellow, engaged to a Miss Lawler: one of the Devonshire Lawlers. Is there anyone here of that name?"

All I could do now was to keep him away from the subject, and the chance of meeting them. Unfortunately there remained two hours to dispose of before his train left. We strolled down to the sea, took a turn on the Esplanade, and up the cliff by the old town. About half a mile from Rocksedge lies a fine old ruined church, and the Colonel, to my unexpected relief, professed himself a bit of an archaeologist, and expressed a wish to explore it. As it lay on the

road to the station I ordered my trap to meet us there, and off we started.

The Colonel had a great deal to say about ruins, and we amused ourselves harmlessly for some time, tracing out foundations, peering into holes and corners, and examining vestiges of ancient decorative work. He was in the middle of explaining authoritatively how the whole place came to be built, when I felt a cold thrill shoot through me, as a voice I knew sounded through the roofless aisle from the other side of the mouldering wall.

"I don't want to hurry you, but isn't it almost time to start?" I cried. The Colonel had turned away, and was digging excitedly in a corner with his umbrella.

"Roman, distinctly Roman!" declared he, straightening himself. "It's not easy to mistake the handiwork. Just see here for yourself, Travers. There has been an inner coating of cement; I grant you that." (As if I had ever disputed it! And the voices drawing nearer and nearer.) "Have that carefully cleared, and you'll find as fine an example of herring-bone work——" (There was Scrap's black nose round the gap in the wall.) "The Saxons imitated it, you know, but they hadn't the stuff to work with——"

"Of course; they did, there's some up there," I declared. (A yellow Japanese parasol appeared at the opening, and paused.)

"Where? Saxon herring-bone work?" asked Wriothlesley, eagerly.

"Of course; up there. Lots of it," and I dragged him up a grassy mound where was once a chancel. "Don't you see something like it hereabouts?" Another minute and we should have descended safely on the far side, but, as luck would have it, in that minute Scrap spied me, and with a sociable bark came tearing up to us, and May after Scrap. She stopped on seeing us and bowed demurely.

"Who's that?" demanded the Colonel—as great a connoisseur, I knew, in female beauty as in Roman tiling. He caught my arm, and Mrs. Pierpoint stepped into the sunlighted space in front of us.

"Eh! What!" and Colonel Wriothlesley adjusted his pince nez in a violent hurry. I saw the startled look on her face—the detected look. I saw, with a sense of sickening humiliation, her glance of dismay at the sight of me. But all my worst imaginings paled and faded before the shock that followed.

"Eh?" cried the Colonel. "It is—no really—little May Algar and—Lady Dorothy Champneys," and he trotted down the bank with outstretched hands to greet—my Godmother!

I don't know what the proper bearing of the hero of such a dramatic situation should have been; I only know what I did. I made off as quickly as possible, and without a word. I don't know what the Colonel thought, or how he got into the dog-cart and away to the train. I heard his wheels roll off as I sat on a fragment of an over-turned pillar in a secluded angle of the ruined transept, holding my head in my hands and struggling with the bewilderment of this most

astounding revelation. Lady Dorothy Champneys, Mrs. Pierpoint! My godmother here, all the time comparing my letters and knowing that I considered her an Impostor. To whom had I been writing, and with which was I in love? Both were the same, of course: but, I lifted my dazed head, and—there she stood.

"Are you *very* angry—past all forgiveness?" she demanded, in a soft little voice. "It seemed such an innocent little plot—and all for May's sake. I didn't know how utterly it had failed till your letter reached me this morning."

She suddenly blushed red as a rose. I kept a pitiless silence.

"You seemed so set against the poor child, and wrote so disagreeably and sarcastically about matchmakers and their victims, that it was a temptation to give you a lesson; or at any rate to determine that May *should* have a fair chance—that you should be forced into forming an unprejudiced judgment of her. It was such an opening!" she pleaded. "We came home unexpectedly. I had absolutely nothing to do, and nowhere in particular to go, and was just speculating on the possibility of taking you unawares at Rocksedge, when in came your letter, telling me even the train by which you were going down there yourself."

"So the meeting was a put up thing?"

"Didn't I tell you so?" slightly laughing.

"And the photograph?" I demanded, still stern.

"That was taken after the theatricals. You know I told you all about them. I was disgusted when I found you took that thing for a genuine likeness; too disgusted to undeceive you, especially as I hadn't a better to send."

"And you read all the letters I wrote to you about yourself?"

"Of course—" faltering for the first time. "What then?"

"This! You were acting a part for a few days' amusement, while I was unhappily in earnest—in bitter earnest!"

She stood with her head bent, silent and confused.

"However, I am glad of it," I declared, springing to my feet and confronting her. "It has helped me to find out something that I might have gone through my life unknowing. I understand you now, Lady Dorothy!"

She lifted her dark eyes affrighted. "What do you understand?"

"That you love me, Dorothy, as I love you. You *could* not be Dorothy—the Dorothy that I have known and loved all these long years, my darling, and have played your part to the end, if you had not meant the end to be . . . THIS!"

And I caught her in my arms.

UNDER THE LIMES.

IN the last sweet hours of sunny June,
 When summer was ringing her loudest chimes,
 I stood in the shade in the sultry noon—
 In the shade of the sweetly scented limes.
 In the cloistered arch of the boughs above
 The bees were singing their anthem low,
 And the sough of the wind was soft with love,
 As it blew on my heart—as I heard it blow.

A voice, that was sweeter than wind or bee,
 Spoke there with such solemn earnestness,
 That the face grew pale as it turned to me,
 And the eyes looked dim in their deep distress :
 " Oh, I could not live if love were gone,
 And I cared for none till I cared for you—"
 And the antiphon of the bees went on,
 While the southing wind in the branches blew.

Yet ever the roses died away,
 The love was dying—the love was dead,
 And the eyes that burned my heart that day,
 Burnt all the flowers of my heart instead ;
 The lips that framed those changeless vows,
 Gave careless greeting when next we met ;
 Yet the wind still sighed in the scented boughs,
 And the bees were in the branches yet.

Since then, I have wondered many a time
 If I really stood on that day in June,
 And heard the bees in the fragrant lime,
 With the southing wind and my heart in tune.
 Perhaps 'twas a dream, and the dreamer I !
 And dreams are fickle, as all men know !
 But whenever I smell the limes, I sigh,
 And the wind is weird, when I hear it blow.

J. T. BURTON WOLLASTON.

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON," &c.

IT had been very pleasant, that day at Herm and Jethou. And the boatmen could not have found their patience heavily taxed, for they hoped we should visit the little islands—or some other islands—some other day. It was very pleasant, too, in walking through the streets of Guernsey, to come every now and then upon one or other of the men we had employed in our various little cruises; to see their faces light up in recognition, and to hear a jovial voice, accompanied by quite an orthodox salute, exclaim: "Fine weather, sir! Hope you mean to give us another day on the water." It was good to feel that we had left a pleasant impression behind, and that at least for one day in their lives, these men, from coming into contact with us, were none the worse, none the less happy, none the poorer. A small matter; but our lives are made up of small matters. It is the small things of life we should look up and look after; the great ones will take care of themselves. It requires more real strength, moral courage, resolution to go day by day through life's small duties, which by frequent recurrence and familiarity grow so prosy and so commonplace, than to raise oneself by one stupendous effort to the glory of martyrdom.

Day by day, in Guernsey, we seemed to find out new walks and fresh attractions. The twists and turnings of the roads seemed to become quite intricate, and when we thought we had reached the end of a given area, behold fresh fields and pastures new to right and left. The place seemed to expand, until, at the close of our stay, we began to feel as if we knew less of it than we had known at the beginning. It was almost perplexing. Houses embowered in green trees, or screened behind high walls, made one long to sojourn within their cool retreats. The perpetual seclusion of a monastery must be petrifying to body and spirit, a weariness to the soul; but an occasional withdrawal from the hurry and bustle, the "double, double, toil and trouble," of the world, to quiet rooms and smiling lawns, and cool breezes laden with the scent of flowers—this only enables us to plume our feathers and expand our wings for onward flight, and shake off the dust of the earth—which will not leave us quite unspotted, try as we will—and gather together fresh strength for the conflict which never ceases: for the ever-recurring moments and days when the battle grows too strong, and life too sad, and the soul goes out like the dove from the ark, and behold, nothing but a wide waste of waters, and a lost world, and grey skies, and a sun

withdrawn, and not even the promise of an olive branch, and no resting-place, no resting-place anywhere for the sole of her foot.

Within the town, too, there was much that was pleasant. After six days spent on the water, or in scrambling amongst the rocks, or looking out skywards and seawards from some fine point or headland, or exploring lanes and villages, or familiarising oneself with ghostly tenements, it was especially grateful and restful to spend the morning of the seventh amongst the cool arches and solid pillars and high-backed pews of the old parish church. In a very small way there was a cloistered atmosphere about it, calm and dignified. It was never crowded, and perhaps it is wrong to say that the half-empty benches added very much to the peaceful and refreshing element that hung about the aisles. But in a London church it is so hard to feel in church. The rustle of silks and satins, the head-dresses that are often so fearfully and wonderfully made, the wandering glances, the restless hands, the constant movement around, which is seen even with closed eyes: it all makes one feel in coming out—well, that the peace which passeth all understanding seems much nearer to us in a quiet, homely country church, where we may find an aid, not an interruption, in watching through the windows the fleecy clouds floating across the blue sky, and the trees waving and rustling in the noiseless breeze, and listening to the birds, “ever soaring, ever singing.” There, indeed, we find rest unto our souls.

Again, within the town, we found more mundane attractions. One day, in our exquisite and beloved little Sark, we entered the small church, where every Sunday a service is held in French, and the little band of Sercquois worship in their simple way. It has very little of the ceremonial, this service, and so the spiritual has no let or hindrance there. In the church we found a stonemason carving an inscription on a marble tablet. He had come over from Guernsey expressly to do the work, and the weather kept him a prisoner on the island. He was full of intelligence, and told us many anecdotes and traditions concerning the islands and the people. Amongst other things, how, not so many years ago, people would flock from far and near, even from England, to eat boiled bacon and pancakes on Shrove Tuesday in a certain house in St. Peter's Port, famous for these delicacies. It sounded an odd mixture; but tastes differ, and happily, are as varied as the wind is uncertain. And as there are some singular and nerveless people who glory in a strong easterly breeze, so mercifully there are tastes that find beauty in ugliness, and soft flowing curves in the most acute angles: and things that grate and jar upon one will pass unnoticed by another.

“And, sirs,” continued our pleasant informant, “though bacon and pancakes have disappeared, the real Guernsey cake still exists. And if you wish to taste it in perfection you must go to a certain baker's in the market place.”

I forget the name of the shop; but if we do wrong, I fear there is

too much consolation in the thought that others do wrong too, and so, reader, I will describe it, for your future possible benefit, as precisely as possible. It lies, then, on the left-hand side of the market-place as you go from the sea, and it is quite three parts of the whole way up. Tempting loaves and soft rolls and rich cakes are in the window, and two gentle-voiced, lady-like women supply your needs. We found them out one day, and to our consciences called it five o'clock tea ; but it was utterly a work of supererogation, and if it spared our host's resources at the dinner that so soon followed, it worked no special good to ourselves. But the white china plates were attractive, and the Guernsey cake, cut in large, hot, smoking pieces by liberal hands, was excellent, and the ladies behind the



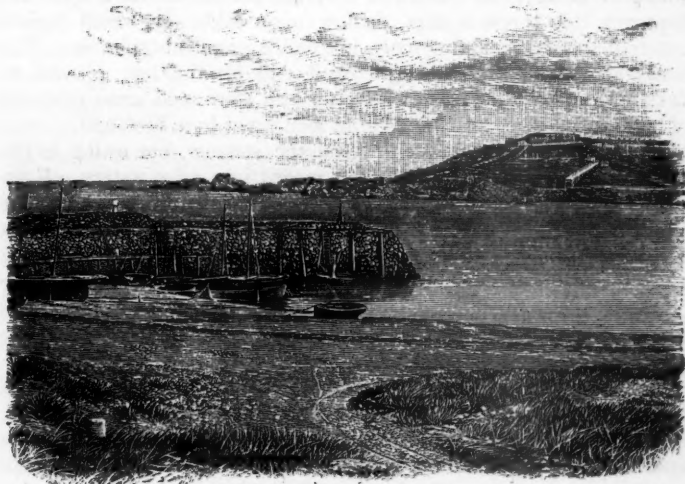
ENTRANCE TO ALDERNEY.

counter had a pleasant way of chatting, and gave us many a wrinkle about the islands, and many a bit of information, which, we will pretend, was, more than the cake, the main object of our repeated visits. Our kind host would put down loss of appetite to other causes. "I think, sirs, you must be overdoing it in the way of exertion," with a shake of the head ; or : "Surely you are not doing justice to Guernsey air !" but we never confessed that Guernsey cake, not Guernsey air, was at the bottom of it all ; that the disease was moral, not physical.

Nevertheless, pleasant though Guernsey was, we could not shake from our spirits those little solitary islands of Sark, and Herm and Jethou, where, to quote once more those words so full of solemn meaning, we had found rest unto our souls. And as there was one more island to be seen, and that we wished to see before leaving Guernsey for good—the Island of Alderney—no wonder that one

morning, in spite of a heavy sea that was running, and skies that were not full of promise, we took heart of grace, and departed in the little steamer that plies regularly once or twice a week between Alderney and Guernsey, wind and weather permitting. The passage is often frightfully rough, and on this occasion it was bad enough to draw from H. the remark that it was the happiest time he had yet spent in the Channel Islands. Every man to his taste, even the most eccentric and the most insane. Away we went, pitching and tossing, steering bravely and steadily amongst the rocks that abound on the Guernsey coast, over which the waves were dashing in angry, seething hillocks of foam and froth.

The passage takes about two hours, and the steamer being very



THE OLD HARBOUR, ALDERNEY.

small, it is indeed, in tempestuous weather, a *mauvais quart d'heure* to those who are not sea-proof. On this occasion we mounted the bridge between the paddle-boxes, and had a most splendid game at see-saw. The boat went up and down like the swings one sees at a village fair, and if the play was varied, it was only to turn itself into the circular motion of a merry-go-round: that wonderful and misnamed instrument of torture, without which no fair would be perfect in youthful estimation.

Our little steamer bravely made way, in spite of rough usage, and in due time we found ourselves nearing Alderney. The approach is at its finest point, where the cliffs are highest and grandest, and give rise to hopes and expectations not afterwards fulfilled. To-day the aspect as we neared the island was unusually splendid. Small detached rocks abounded, stretching far out around the coast, and

the waves dashed over them with tremendous fury. Dashed too, against the island itself, as if they would hurl it from its very foundation. We rounded, and came up with the immense breakwater, which, owing to some error in site or construction, has not withstood the sea, and has fallen away in two places.

It was a veritable witch's caldron. The whole scene was sublime and terrific. Great waves were rushing in, wave after wave, rolling and breaking, and sweeping onwards. They met the breakwater and dashed over it with a noise of thunder. White foam and spray swept high into the air, and the water swirled over the inner walk of the breakwater like a miniature Niagara. All around, far as the eye could reach, the sea was heaving and swelling, rising and falling. The sky, now black and lowering, seemed to frown upon our approach. It threw a dark shadow upon Alderney, which looked indescribably grand and gloomy, but chilling and inhospitable. The forts themselves, on the right hand and on the left, seemed to declare that the place existed only for the stern and cruel purposes of war, and that pleasure and profit would not here be found.

Up, within the breakwater, passed the steamer, but owing to the two breaches in the masonry, by no means into calm waters. Even when alongside the jetty, it was some time before she could be moored, for she floated like a cork upon the waves, and fenders and other safeguards had to be used to keep her from beating against the stonework. All this time, down the length of the breakwater, which is considerable, the sea was ever and anon flushing over, and pouring in a torrent of foam and spray that few would have cared to encounter.

At length we landed; the difficult fact was accomplished. A small crowd waited there to meet the boat, and one or two vehicles, half carts, half baggage-waggon. But everyone seemed to have his destined occupation, and not a creature would, for love or money, consent to carry our bag to the hotel. At last—necessity is the mother of invention—H. suggested that we should become our own porters and lighten our labour by slinging the bag on our sticks and carrying it between us, after the manner of Caleb and Joshua with the grapes of Eshcol. In this way we made progress, even though it was uphill work. The steamer remained long enough to transact her business, and then proceeded on her way to Cherbourg. She would return in the afternoon of the next day, when, if we had had enough of Alderney, we might set sail for Guernsey.

Certainly the earliest impression one gains of Alderney is that it is strongly fortified. Immense sums have been spent upon the works. At first sight these fortifications seem utterly out of place and unnecessary, but the position of Alderney is said, by those who ought to know, to require all the strength that has been given to it. We accepted this declaration in faith, nothing doubting.

The second impression, to those who are carrying their own

baggage, is, that it is a very tough climb to get to the inn, and that if there is only one in the place, it might have quartered itself somewhat nearer the pier. But the longest lane has a turning, and Scott's Hotel loomed upon us at last. We had been told that Mrs. Scott, the landlady, was very independent; would take in whom she pleased and reject whom she would; was capable of sacrificing herself for those she took a fancy to, and for the unhappy ones with whom she did not fall in love at first sight, would do little or nothing.

We believe nothing of all this; or, if it be true, we certainly fell at once into her good graces. We were the first arrivals, and seeing no one and making no one hear, we boldly marched through, right into her very kitchen.

It might have been a palace, so spotlessly clean, so wonderfully orderly was the whole room: and somehow, a well-appointed kitchen is a sight that comes home to us, conjuring up all sorts of homely and domestic visions and pleasant emotions. As a rule, too, it is the embodiment of unceremonious comfort. This particular kitchen certainly was. And not the least comfortable and pleasant object was Mrs. Scott herself, who stood in the middle of the floor and gazed at us as if we had dropped from the clouds. We at once fell in love with her motherly face and earnest grey eyes, and felt ourselves at home. Then her tongue loosened.

"Eh, my dears!" She lifted up her hands to give force to the exclamation. It was impossible not to smile at the greeting. Coming from her kindly lips and voice, it had a genuine, unstudied directness which made it not in the least familiar, but very pleasant. At once we were no longer strangers, but might have known her for ten years.

"Eh, my dears! but you must have had a rough passage!" And as Mrs. Scott was the widow of a former captain of one of these boats, she was an authority upon the point. "And you are wet and cold!" she cried, coming up to H., who had received on the voyage, more than once, the benediction of a wave. And forthwith she conducted him to the roaring fire, and turned him round and round, for all the world as if he had been a jack wound up and hung, and ready to begin its work. Our hold upon the house at any rate was secure, and Mrs. Scott's best and kindest was at our service.

And so, by and by, all things comfortably settled, we wandered out to become acquainted with the island.

It may at once be said that the aspect of Alderney is most mournful, most melancholy. It has the appearance of a town once populated, now deserted; the look of a dead city. In revenge, it possesses the newest, and, in the opinion of many, the most beautiful church in all the islands, built after designs by Gilbert Scott. The town itself is quaint, irregular, without any vestige of beauty. The principal streets are deserted, whether in the morning, at mid-

day, or in the evening. The shops seem to exist for their own sake, not for the sake of the community. We never saw anyone within them, and if we ourselves entered, those who served seemed to wake up from a trance. Of course things are not actually quite so bad as this, or the shops themselves would cease to exist; but one old Frenchman, who shook his head sadly, and lamented in a torrent of eloquent words his "*belle France*," did not hesitate to declare, in tones fitted to the sentiment: "*Ah, monsieur! c'est une ville morte!*" Years ago, he declared that, comparatively speaking, they had done there a thriving trade. Four thousand workmen were upon the island, building the fortifications: they had brought life and



ALDERNEY.

business with them. But, the works finished, the men had departed, and the place became more dead than if they had never been there.

This accounted for the rows of shut-up houses one came across. They looked, indeed, as if the plague had swept away the inmates, or as if the Court of Chancery had thrown its stagnant and destructive influence over them. They were abandoned to the rats; windows were broken, shutters closed, an atmosphere of death and decay hung about them.

Then, besides the two principal streets of Alderney—at right angles with each other—there are inferior streets, which might be called the east end of the town. They are dirty, crooked, and ill-paved, or not paved at all. The cottages looked old and decrepit; they might be so many cow-sheds. One passes quickly along, glad to escape from their depressing influence. And all through the town,

in every street, you may walk up and down and wander to and fro, and never meet a soul, see no face at any window. Perhaps it is not always so; it was so with us. A very different thing, this depressing desolation, from the grand, invigorating solitudes of Sark. These seemed to proclaim nothing but the death of man, those the life, health-giving quietudes of nature.

But the greater part of Alderney does not offend in this way. You may stroll over nearly all the island and see no trace of habitation. It is one mournful stretch of country; some of it cultivated, much of it nothing but hills and valleys, and downs of gorse and heather and grass. It is very melancholy and depressing: has in it very little



ST. ANNE'S CHURCH, ALDERNEY.

beauty. Occasionally you come upon a ruined kiln, and the bare walls of a house that must once have echoed to the sound of human voices, and they look old enough to have passed into antiquities. But as a rule you see nothing but the bare country around you, and if you are not sure of your way, there is no one to put you right. Sign-boards there are none, and if there were, perhaps they could bear only one announcement: "This way to Scott's Hotel." Scarcely there seemed any roads in the island. Half the time, in going from one point to another, we were walking over ploughed fields, trudging up and down heavy hill sides, getting into bogs and marshes unawares—and for what reward? Certainly we grew inconceivably weary, for it was hard work getting about Alderney, but the beauties of nature were conspicuous by their absence. I cannot remember that we saw a single tree. The shady lanes of Sark, with their

over-arching, interlacing branches existed not here. No banks of wildflowers, and only now and again a blackberry hedge or two.

One piece of colouring we met, but it was sad of tone. We came upon the cemetery just as a military funeral was going on, and the scarlet coats of the soldiers stood out in bright contrast with the surrounding landscape. It was the funeral, if I remember, of a non-commissioned officer, who had slowly died of consumption. He had been a Roman Catholic, and the priests in their robes, and the cross that was elevated, formed an imposing pageant to the eyes of those who had come upon it unawares. The soldiers fired a volley over the grave, and the air was startled with the sharp sound, and then all was over, and everyone departed, and the tenant of the new grave was left to await that great day when at the sound of the last trumpet we all shall come forth to Judgment.

Our one reward for visiting Alderney was its rocky coast. Here and there the cliffs are exceedingly fine, and almost more picturesque than any to be found in the other islands. They are occasionally fantastic in shape, and splendid in their varied colour. There are splendid bits that overhang the shore, and tall cliffs that are perpendicular. So much so that we could not get down to the white, enticing beach below, and this was tantalising. One longed to reach the bottom and look upwards at these eternal monuments of nature ; it was impossible to appreciate them properly without doing so ; but it would have been more easy to scale a house.

To take a boat and go round was equally impossible. The sea was raging ; the sky was dark and lowering ; a strong, cold wind searched out one's very bones ; and every now and then showers came down with a strength that defied anything in the shape of an umbrella. This was very much against us and against the island. In summer weather and under sunny skies, there is quite enough to repay one in Alderney for a run across from Guernsey, especially as peace and plenty abound at Scott's Hotel. But in uncertain seasons, when the days are growing cold and the sun goes down before the afternoon is well over, then to visit Alderney is a mistake. We did not regret it, being of a contented mind, and reading sermons in stones, and books in the running brooks ; nevertheless we felt that a sojourn of many days would have proved Alderney a weariness to the flesh.

And our stay was destined to be not quite so short as we had anticipated. If the day of our arrival was boisterous, what can be said of the next, when we were to return ? If the sea had run hills yesterday, to-day it ran mountains. The steamer from Cherbourg was hours behind time, and everyone prophesied that she would not venture from the shelter of that magnificent harbour. However, about two o'clock in the afternoon, in she struggled, drenched to the skin, if one may apply the term to a boat. She had been buffeted about by the stormy winds and tempests, and was

weeping salt tears. But she was going on to Guernsey, and so we packed up and said good-bye to kindly Mrs. Scott, and carried our bag down as we had brought it up, like another Caleb and Joshua.

At the boat all was confusion. There was an immense cargo of wood to land, men were working like slaves, and even some of the passengers helped; for unless we could get out by four o'clock, said the skipper, and so make Guernsey by daylight, he would not leave Alderney before to-morrow morning. Everyone felt this to be wisdom. The wind and the waves were roaring. If the sea broke over the pier yesterday like a miniature Niagara, to-day it seemed bent upon rivalling those celebrated falls. We made the vessel through showers of spray, glad to do it even on those terms.

And the time went on, and four o'clock struck, and the work was not done, and the captain said there should be no going out to-day, for him or for anyone. At half-past seven to-morrow morning he would start, not before. There was nothing for it but to go back and throw ourselves once more on Mrs. Scott's mercy; and this time we found a lad to relieve us of our encumbrances.

Mrs. Scott was not surprised to see us again. She had given a shrewd guess as to what would happen, and was prepared for our reappearance. To those who had time to spare, the only unpleasant part of the delay was the fact of having to get up early and turn out the next morning; but Mrs. Scott faithfully promised breakfast at 6.30, and no end of creature comforts, and we felt that after all there is a silver lining to every cloud. The clouds to-day certainly were very thick indeed, and the lining was all out of sight, but we hoped the morning might bring a change.

The change was of the slightest. The steamer had left the side, and we had to reach it in a small boat. It was hard work to get into it, and I wondered whether we should be swamped or merely get drenched in making the good ship. Before 7.30 everyone was on board, and away we went. And what a passage we had! She shook and trembled, and vibrated and rocked and tossed about, and did everything but turn head over heels. Once I thought she had even done that, for she stood nearly on end, paused as if to take counsel with herself, and I waited for the next move, and wondered what it would be. It really seemed doubtful. But she behaved nobly, and she was in the hands of a man whose skill and courage had carried him through worse straits than these.

We left Alderney enshrouded in a morning mist which clung about it, but was not on the sea. The waves dashed over the rocks with a fury I have scarcely ever seen equalled; indeed I have never seen any spot look so wild and dangerous, so exposed to the rage and violence of all the elements. The sight was nothing less than terrifically grand and sublime, and alone would have repaid us for our visit. Above, on the bridge, clinging to anything that would give

support, we gazed upon a scene that the coming years would never efface from memory.

After a quick but stormy passage, for the last time we entered the quiet waters of Guernsey harbour. Our stay was drawing to a close. For three weeks the comfortable shelter of Old Government House had been our head quarters, and we had always returned to it with feelings of pleasure; even as, when the hour came, we left it with regret. But time runs on, sometimes all too quickly. For us, in these days, the sun will not stand still, or go back ten degrees, and we have no Joshua to command it, and no Hezekiah to pray for it. The beauties and glory even of this world are greater than our minds can always fully realise, and our souls bow down before them in silent adoration of Him by whom are all things and for Whose pleasure they are and were created. But after all we have them only occasionally. They come before us and vanish as a dream that is told. Summer gives place to winter, when nature dies, and the heart grows sad, while yet living in hope of spring. And presently, almost before we know it, our own life's spring-time has changed to summer, as our summer must one day yield to winter, when the golden bowl will break and the pitcher go for the last time to the fountain. It must come, and our days are fleeting, and life is sad, and saddest of all the inevitable fact that all things change; friends fall away, loved voices that made our music are hushed, and eyes that were our delight are closed, and our heart has gone with them to the silent land, while we remain behind, sad and solitary pilgrims. And so, will not one of our greatest charms and delights in the next world be our eternal youth, where, if we gain experience and make progress, it shall not bring to us furrows and grey hairs, or pain or sorrow, or memories full of regrets, or consciences laden with remorse; the miseries of life shall be no more, and the mistakes of life shall have been turned aside to bear good fruit. Eternal sunshine and eternal youth, and happiness and companionship without measure. And everlasting spring in nature, and we ministers of boundless realms: melodies around us and within us that ear hath not heard nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. Then—

All hail the hour when Heaven's celestial chimes,
Shall ring our souls to that eternal shore,
And safe within those everlasting climes
We clasp our loved and lost for evermore!

THE OLEANDER.

BY A. DE GRASSE STEVENS, AUTHOR OF "OLD BOSTON," &c.

WE who know the Lady Diana love her, because of the love that is reflected in her beautiful face. Her youthful eyes look out upon the world fearlessly, yet with a touch of retrospection and sadness in their depths; a sadness that deepens at any appeal to her sympathies, or vanishes at any tale of happiness, especially if that happiness has come as an unlooked-for sequence to sorrow and trouble.

She has only just touched the outer circle of years when a woman leaves behind her the first freshness of girlhood, and takes up the more serious side of life. And in spite of the snow-white hair that shades her low, broad brow, and deep, serious eyes, she is what she appears to be: a woman, young, handsome, high-born. It is a face and a character strangely attractive, because, seemingly, so open and so easily understood.

She is very kind-hearted in a gentle, quiet fashion, and when she confers a favour it is done with so matchless a grace that its worth is double that bestowed by anyone else. Were it not for the sad, reflective expression that gathers on her face when in repose, and that lurks always in the shadow of her dark eyes, you would write her down, not only the most fortunate among women, but also the most happy. When my little history of her is finished you may each judge whether this would be a truthful decision regarding her.

As we all know, she is the only daughter of the late Earl of Welford, and at his death inherited a considerable portion of his personal wealth and a small estate in Hampshire that had come to her through her mother. Her only brother, the present Lord Welford, was never a favourite, either at home or in the world, and Lady Diana saw as little of him as family feeling would allow; but until she reached her majority he was her guardian and trustee, and assumed complete control over her actions. How she broke these irksome bonds will be seen later on.

Of course Lady Diana had a brilliant first season. She was rich, beautiful, and owned a lineage second to none in the peerage. What more could any right-minded young lady desire? She drove the prettiest ponies in the park, rode the finest horse in the row, owned the most perfect sapphires out of the royal regalia, had a charming house in Park Lane and an old estate in Hampshire, whose traditions and histories would fill a volume of themselves; and yet—and yet—the Lady Diana was not altogether happy.

In these days Diana's eyes were speculative only and beautiful,

while the glorious coronet of hair that crowned her small head was alight and glowing, imprisoning every unwary sunbeam in its golden sheen. Diana possessed one friend, to whom she opened as much of her inner nature as lay in her power to impart. This friend often gave advice to Diana, which she very rarely followed. I am not sure that Millicent Denman was altogether a judicious confidant for Lady Diana; but be that as it may, she was loyal, and loyalty counts for much, and should weigh down the balance against frivolity and want of judgment. I wonder how many of us could prove our title to loyalty as securely as Millicent Denman?

The house in Park Lane, where Lady Diana lives now, is the same over which she ruled as a young princess of eighteen. The drawing-room is little changed. I can remember the same white panelled walls decorated with rare pictures, and a fragile cup or tazza of Saxe or old Dresden on velvet consoles; the same amber draperies fall at the windows, and the same quaint chairs and divans invite repose or suggest confidences. But apart from its surroundings, this boudoir possesses a curious charm of its own. It does not consist in the subtle perfume that clings to each fold of drapery, a perfume as intangible as it is seductive, since there are never any flowers here. Flowers are in abundance all about the house, but not in Diana's own private and particular room. I questioned her once on this point and she answered with one of her slow, sweet smiles:

"My dear Theresa, do you never punish yourself? Or rather, do you never enforce a penance upon yourself? Once, long ago, I willfully destroyed one of God's most beautiful flowers; was I worthy after that to indulge myself with their beauty, when, in a passion, I tore asunder each blossom and cast them beneath my feet? My dear, I have been forgiven, but I cannot forget."

Nor does it exist in the wealth of books, so daintily bound, so richly embossed, nor in the sheen of Moorish plaques that catch the gleam of firelight on their Tyrian discs and flash back a trinity of colour, red, golden, purple, from out the century of time they represent. No, it is something apart from these accessories; the influence of a presence distinct yet invisible, that dwells within the apartment and dominates it with a furtive yet positive personality.

It was the spring of 1871, and Lady Diana had come up to town just when all the primroses and cowslips were decking the Hampshire meadows with golden glory, and the great crimson and white may trees before the low stone porch at Heron's Court were bursting into full bloom, and flinging wide their sweets with Nature's lavish generosity. The trees in Hyde Park were fresh and green, the horse-chestnut buds at Bushey growing daily larger. Flowers bloomed everywhere.

London was alive once more. The season, with its rush and toil after pleasure, was in full tide, and amongst the gayest, the most admired, the most fêted was the Lady Diana. The house in Park

Lane resounded all day long to the echo of happy voices and gay laughter. Di's feet were never weary, her spirits never flagged, her enjoyment never faltered. She sang, she danced, she flirted, she rode, she drove; and her aunt, good-natured old Lady Paragon, was heard to declare, that not all her own bevy of wild Irish girls had caused her one half the amusement, excitement and fatigue that the chaperonage of beautiful Lady Diana entailed upon her.

On this particular morning Diana was discussing, not too amiably, the counter attractions of a very grand dinner versus a merry drive to Richmond, a row on the river, and an impromptu dance and supper at her own home, on their return.

Lady Paragon was all in favour of the dinner, naturally, being old and a trifle stout, with a soul not above truffles, forced strawberries, and hot-house peaches, interspersed by the latest risqué on-dit and most piquant scandal. But Diana and Millicent Denman would hear of nothing so respectable and dull, and to this effect Di's young voice was raised in rather loud tones.

"It's perfectly horrid," she was saying to the long-suffering Dowager. "I never heard, or read, or dreamed of such barbarity! To want to go to old Lord Potmore's on such a night as this, and stuff oneself with baked meats until one is as red and as cross as twenty Potmores rolled into one!"

"My dear Diana," expostulated her ladyship, "you really should be careful! You make such random statements, my love! I am positively certain that Lord Potmore's cook knows quite well that to serve baked meats is not at all the thing; and as to my growing red and cross—my dear Diana, my complexion and temper are my two strong points."

"Now you know you want to go, Aunt Parry," cried Diana shortly, "because the Reigne-bisque is particularly good at Potmore House. I have heard you say so thousands of times. Now I detest Reigne-bisque, and I know I shall be as cross and as ugly as Theresa, who sits moping there, if you make me go; and when I do look ugly, you know there is no one can touch me."

"Oh, Diana," said Lady Paragon plaintively, "what can I do? We have been promised, you know, for a fortnight—and then there is Welford. Your brother will never forgive me, for you know quite well who is to be there, especially to meet you."

"If you mean Horace Browne," cried Di, with flashing eyes, emphasizing each syllable of his name scornfully, "then I can tell you, Aunt Paragon, I simply *won't go*. Welford ought to be ashamed to treat me so. I hate Horace Browne. He's disagreeable and deceitful, and if Welford thinks to make me listen to him by threats or by promises, he is very much mistaken. He can keep my money from me, I know, but he cannot, and he shall not, make me marry a man I despise."

Diana burst into tears, and sobbed so piteously and so long that it

took Lady Paragon and Millicent, with what small assistance I could offer, an hour or more to console her. Of course she got her own way in the end; Lady Paragon braved the wrath of Lord Potmore and Welford alone, and Diana and Millicent went off to Richmond under the care of little Mrs. Camoys, Millicent's married sister. I remained at home, but that was nothing new; I was only Theresa White, a poor relation, whom in her capricious way Diana loved, and in her heart, I think, respected.

I never knew all that happened at Richmond. The girls came home in the gayest spirits, and both the dance and the supper were a great success, poor Lady Paragon relinquishing the most seductive post-dinner anecdotes to hurry home and give countenance to the affair. When Mrs. Camoys came she was accompanied by a tall, dark young man, whom I had never seen before, and whose manner was a curious mingling of boyish frankness and foreign politeness. He seemed a little, a very little, shy, as if unused to such gatherings, and to the light and colour and unobtrusive richness of his surroundings. He was very handsome certainly, with a brow broad, like Keats, and hair so dark as to appear black, brushed back from his forehead; his eyes were large and calm, but with a faithfulness and constancy in their regard that bespoke a nature trusting and believing. His hands were small, dark-tinted, and with fingers as delicate as a lady's.

Mrs. Camoys presented him to Lady Paragon, who looked at him doubtingly, ere her good nature responded to his deferential manner. I did not hear his name until late in the evening, when Millicent whispered to me hurriedly:

"Isn't he too delightful? And only think of our securing him, when he was due at a hundred different places! But that's Camilla Camoys' luck; she *always* gets what she wants!"

"But who is he, Millicent?" I asked, catching hold of her arm as she was flying off.

"Who is what?" she cried. "Oh, Theresa, don't you know? but you never do know anything. Why, Tito de Lisle, to be sure, you little ignoramus!"

Antonio de Lisle was a name well known in those days. He had made, so to speak, a triumphal entry into London and London society. By birth a Tuscan, he inherited his beauty, his quick appreciation and adaptability from his high-born Italian mother, his grand air and noble carriage from his English father, who was a cadet of the old and honourable family of de Lisle, and who, having contracted a marriage of the affections when very young, renounced his country, and dwelt and died in that of his southern bride. Antonio, the only child of this union, had never seen the land of his Norman forefathers, and held for it none of the love and veneration with which he clothed his mother's fairer country. He was an artist, but an artist of a century, with the genius of a Tintoretto, and the religion

of a Raphael. Santa Lucca, in Rome, was the first to recognise his genius; then followed the Salon and Munich; and, lastly, the great Academy of England opened its doors to the young foreigner, who, after all, was not a foreigner, but an alien, and admitted his pictures to places of honour on the line.

He also brought letters of introduction to one or two of his father's old friends, and if his work was warmly received and indiscriminately praised, his own welcome lacked nothing in cordiality and empressment.

Camilla Camoys had been among the first to know and patronise him; a patronage he quietly set aside in his own way; and she it was who carried him off from a dinner and two balls, to dance attendance upon her at a frivolous Richmond party. I am not above the average woman in my curiosity, and therefore I looked at Tito with much inward satisfaction. Meantime the music went on about me, and light feet trod out the hours to flying measures.

In the midst of it all, the door opened and Lord Welford entered, accompanied by a stranger. He stood for a few moments unnoticed; a tall, fair man, who, save for a furtive, uncertain glance, would have passed as good-natured and inoffensive. His companion was also tall and fair, with a waxen sallowness of cheek and forehead, heightened by his sandy hair and black evening dress.

Welford surveyed the room in silence, and then with a short nod to his friend crossed to where I sat, half-hidden by the window draperies. He stood before me, bowing with deliberate politeness, before he addressed me, in his half-bantering, half-earnest fashion.

"Well, Miss White, why do you not join the merry-makers? Is the soul above your foot more tyrannous than that beneath?" he asked, laughing at his own poor wit. "Now I believe, my little Theresa, that you sit solitary here only because no one has asked you to leave your lonely position. Ah, I see I am right. Well then, my little wall flower, I offer you my hand, and insist upon its acceptance."

He put his arm about me as he spoke, and before I could collect my senses, we were whirling about lazily and delightfully to Weber's "Last Waltz."

Lord Welford danced very well, and like most plain people, who are always out of everything of the kind, I was a mad devotee of the art. Presently he stopped, and as we stood at the top of the room, his quick eye noted each passing couple. He spoke at last, bending down to look at me.

"Theresa, who is the excessively dark young man upon whom my sister bestows so many smiles?"

"You mean Antonio de Lisle," I said, proud of my knowledge. "I am sure, Welford, you must be pleased to see him here. Camilla Camoys brought him, and he gave up a dinner and two balls to accompany her."

"Oh, wise Camilla!" exclaimed his lordship, very softly. "'Tis

a pity, Theresa, but I am afraid I must break up Camilla's little game."

Then, without apology, he strolled away from me, and rejoined his friend. I crept back to my corner and watched Diana, as she rested from her waltz, and fanned her flushed cheeks with the feathers of an ibis. Before her stood Tito de Lisle, his dark face all alight with animation. He was looking down upon her, and she with her beautiful eyes upraised, listened to his words, while a tender little smile played about the corners of her mouth.

Across the pretty comedy came Welford, followed by his friend. There was a moment's silence. De Lisle stood aside, and Horace Browne bowed low before Lady Diana. But the girl made no response; she drew up her slender form to its full height; she lowered her crimson fan, and with one stately curtsy she turned from him, and putting her hand on Tito's arm, walked swiftly away from her brother and his disconcerted companion. Lord Welford's face grew very dark; he muttered something beneath his breath; then, with an easy laugh, laid his hand upon Horace Browne's arm, and both shortly afterwards left the room.

The fair spring days gave place to the deeper glories of summer. Diana was very happy, despite her aunt's complaints and her brother's half-scornful, half-threatening words, when in their rare interviews he renewed the subject of Horace Browne's pretensions to her hand. Yes, she was very happy, and the truth of her happiness lay neither in the bottom of a well nor in a leaden casket, for was not Antonio de Lisle always at her side? And did it need any brighter eyes than mine to read the sweet story opening before them, in all its beauty and all its pain?

Alas! poor Lady Diana! Of what was she dreaming when she let her fancy wander away to a possible future, when Tito's presence would be hers by right of possession, and Tito's Tuscan eyes never wander far from the fairness of her face? A daughter of Lord Welford marry a poor painter and half a foreigner! That would be a horror so overwhelming as to strike terror even into the cold hearts and lifeless forms of all the brave Earls of Welford, who lay so quiet and so still in the little old church in Hampshire.

In July the house in Park Lane was closed, and we all went down to Heron's Court. At first Diana was as bright and happy as need be, and to my eyes became more and more beautiful. Then she grew a little restless, and her temper flashed out on certain occasions rather alarmingly. Then she grew listless and dull, moped all day over a book, and cried at night over her imaginary woes.

This went on for some time, but as Lady Paragon did not notice it, and I was sharply repulsed for commenting upon it, there was nothing to be done. I knew what she wanted well enough; haven't we all of us cried for our own particular moon; and who amongst us has forgotten the hopeless misery of such weeping?

In September, Millicent Denman joined us, and immediately Diana recovered her gaiety and her spirits. The fourth day after Millicent's arrival the two girls started off on a long walk through the woods to a certain "wishing-tree," renowned for its miraculous powers when sought with faith. I don't know what petition they proffered to its hoary heart, but if it was what I shrewdly suspected, the old oak did not belie its reputation; for as Aunt Paragon and I were pacing slowly up and down the rose parterre in the afternoon, three happy young voices saluted our ears: two girlish sopranos and a low, mellow baritone. It was an old glee they sang—"All in a Garden Fair"—and the quaint refrain floated sweetly through the evening air.

Lady Paragon and I stood speechless. She made some incoherent exclamation to which I had no time to reply, for as the song ended, followed by a trill of happy laughter, three figures sprang from out the deepening gloom of the acacia trees, and to our consternation it was Antonio de Lisle who accompanied the girls. It was therefore Antonio de Lisle's dangerous voice that had mingled its deeper tones with theirs.

Diana dashed into the subject at once—poor Di; she was always so impetuous.

"Dear Aunt Parry, only see whom we have found! Mr. de Lisle, whom you liked so much in London, you know. He is staying at Petersfield, with the Mortons—come down for some shooting. Fancy an artist liking to kill all the pretty brown partridges!"

Diana stopped, and the young man made his bow to the elder lady, kissing her hand with the courtly grace of a *de Medici*. Who could resist the graciousness of youth to age? Not Lady Paragon. In one moment her prejudices fell from her; she let prudence fly to the winds; she forgot Welford's anger and Horace Browne's claims, and welcomed poor Tito with a cordiality as sincere as it was graceful. Diana was delighted, and Millicent, walking demurely by my side to the house, imparted her conviction that for once the wishing-tree had accorded a prompt and effectual response.

September flew by, and October broke upon us with cold, fresh mornings and evenings, when the open fires made more delightful than ever the low-ceilinged hall and drawing-rooms, and the pretty drama fulfilled itself before our very eyes.

Very often, at this time, I asked myself if the fatal little word had been spoken. Antonio, coming day by day from Petersfield, had grown a part of Diana's life, accepted even as the air she breathed.

He began a portrait of her one day, which was to win him further glory, and on which, poor fellow, he, with the superstition of his race, pinned his failure or success in winning Diana's hand; at least, so I read the writing between the lines. So innocent and so good was his nature, he never thought to weigh her social claims against his,

or find a stumbling-block in the difference between them in station. His art ennobled him, and made him the peer of all men.

The portrait was a very simple one. Diana, in a gown of white satin, was standing, her graceful head crowned with its coronet of golden hair, her beautiful face upraised, her earnest, happy eyes—whose dark shadows caught and held so many changeful expressions—looking forth joyously; in one hand she held a spray of pale pink oleander bloom; and as a counterfoil to this fair woman in her shimmering robes, the young artist had introduced, with happy harmony, a background of the dark shining oleander trees, their polished leaves of varying green relieving here and there the more sombre tones.

For a few days all went well. Diana was pleased and flattered at being painted and adored at one and the same time, and with Millicent Denman enjoyed the hours of posing to the full. Then came a difficulty. Nature, not so willing to own the Lady Diana's supreme sovereignty as were we poor mortals, refused to force into bloom, out of due season, the fragile oleander flowers. The trees were there in full magnificence of leaf, but neither blossom nor bud was discernible. Indeed Macduff, the old Scotch gardener, when impatiently questioned by Diana as to the prospect of any flowers forthcoming, made the depressing statement that, though he had lived ten good years at Heron's Court, his eyes had never seen any one of them in bloom, and to his thinking nothing short of a miracle would produce even the tiniest flower.

Now Diana was a trifle vain, and what she had set her heart upon was to see her counterpart, in fairest guise, hung upon the Academy's walls in the coming May. She knew that November would see them all on the wing for Italy, with no chance of a return until after Easter; how then was her portrait to be accomplished, since, as we all know, it must go to be judged, two weeks before the great spring Festa, by the terrible forty who weigh out fame to the trembling aspirants at Burlington House?

Millicent, however, rose to the occasion. She came dancing in one morning, with a sealed box in her hand addressed to the Lady Diana; this, on being opened, displayed a spray of exquisite pink oleander in full bloom. There came no message with it, but Diana charged Millicent with the gift, and Millicent, looking pleased and proud, could only mutter something about Nice and the South of France, and the rail being wonderful now-a-days. When Tito came that day, the flower was carefully arranged to greet him, and the portrait made several great leaps towards completion. They had turned the morning room into a studio, and Diana had ordered the three great pots of oleanders to be brought from the winter-house and placed as a background to her charms. With these and the spray of blossom Tito would evolve wonders.

The next day saw us as breathlessly eager over the portrait as

though 'twas but just begun. Tito came early, for with a clear morning before him he hoped to see the oleander blooms all transferred to his canvas ere nature's forced flower withered and died. Diana placed herself in position, the sunlight falling in subdued brilliancy across her satin robe, glistening in and out amidst her golden tresses, and caressing into warmer colour the pink flower she held; Millicent on the hearth-rug was making us laugh by her absurd rattle; Lady Paragon was nodding over the last novel from Mudie's, and I was knitting silently, finishing my last half-dozen of serviceable winter hose.

Presently Antonio looked up and made some little half-foolish, half-tender speech, beneath whose light expression lurked a deeper meaning than Diana surmised. She blushed and looked down, twirling the spray of oleander between her slender fingers; and as she so stood, the tell-tale blood in her cheeks and Tito's ardent eyes resting upon her, the door was thrown open and Lord Welford, accompanied by Horace Browne, walked in upon us.

Diana gave a little cry and start as she caught sight of her brother. Antonio, with that innate courtesy that so well became him, laid down his palette and brushes, and with a bow to Welford quietly withdrew, Horace Browne following him.

Without a word of greeting Welford came up to Diana and caught hold of her arm; his face was very pale, his blue eyes flashed, his voice was low but stern.

"I interrupt you, Diana, I fear," he began, "in a most interesting amusement. Truly it is a pretty scene! A young lady dressed at high noon in a costume de bal, posing in sweet simplicity to Signor Italiano, who responds in like manner, and evidently has filled his head with all sorts of unheard-of and impossible ideas and pretensions." Then with sudden warmth, he continued: "In truth, Diana, I am surprised. I think you strangely forget your own dignity, and that due to our name, when you consent to trifle with a passion which you cannot return. Who is this young fellow who dares to instal himself so intimately here, and who would, I repeat, evidently further presume to ally himself with our house?"

Diana broke forth at this. "It is *my* house, Welford, unpleasant as it is to remind you of it. Mr. de Lisle is my guest, invited by me; his name should be passport sufficient, since it is as old and as honourable as our own."

She flashed out at him in a girlish burst of impotent rage, and Welford treated her with as little respect as a child.

"Don't be foolish, Diana; it is useless work splitting straws. As your guardian, I have every right to suggest who shall be admitted as your friends, until you come to years of discretion. I find no fault with Mr. de Lisle as a stranger; but as a friend for you, Diana—I find so many objections in that point of view, that my safest and wisest course is to forbid him the house. I am not only your brother,

Diana, but I am your guardian, and unless you please me in your choice of a husband you will drive me to sterner actions. You can listen to no love and wed no suitor, save such as I sanction. Be obedient, and I will be gentle and show you only love and protection; but—do not cross me, Diana."

Lady Diana looked at him earnestly as he spoke, all the passion and fire of her heart glowing in her eyes. As she stood, white and dauntless before him, her cheeks burned hotly, the waxen oleander flower quivered in her tightly-clasped fingers, as its delicate petals drooped in the fierce noonday sun. Then with a sudden long-drawn sigh, as if awakening from sleep or dream, she moved towards him, her satins trailing after her catching and reflecting the sunbeams. I saw the look upon her face, and I knew that Antonio de Lisle had spoken, and the love wavering in her heart against the pride and prejudice of her race and order, which, if left alone, might possibly have proved too feeble to combat the instincts and education of her creed, was by Welford's ill-advised interference fanned into a depth and constancy that would render the sequel of this morning's action more complex and doubtful than it at present seemed.

In a voice as low and even as his own she answered him :

"You have said enough, Welford. It hurts me, indeed, to think how much of insult you have bestowed upon me. If as a woman I have no claim upon your manhood, as a sister I might surely urge one. I am to have no suitor save as you direct—then I will have none. I am to wed no man save as you may choose—then I will never marry. You have chosen to insinuate a sordid motive for Mr. de Lisle's attentions to me; you have not spared him or me in what you say; and you pretend it is affection that rules your actions towards me. Unfortunately I call it by a less generous name. Be careful; you may take one step too far, and what you think to force on me may turn to your own hurt."

"Do you mean this for a challenge, Diana—your will against mine?" said Lord Welford in low, determined tones. Then, before she could reply, he turned from her with a careless laugh and called out : "Alas! Millicent, was it for *this* I spent my valuable time to procure at your request yonder pink spray Diana cherishes so ardently? It is another lesson in woman's deceit! You told me of your desire, Millicent, but you forgot to mention the reason, or the use for the pretty trifle."

His mirth was interrupted by Diana, who with a short, hard cry burst forth : "I despise you, Welford! You are cowardly in your taunts. And to think I owe *this* to you." She caught the pink flower in her fingers and ruthlessly tore it apart, casting the petals from her in a passion of scorn; then she flung down the denuded stalk and trampled it under her feet.

"I despise you!" she cried under her breath, and with a superb gesture of head and hands she passed from us and went towards the

door. As she neared it Mr. de Lisle entered and met her on the threshold ; she scarcely heeded him, save by a bend of her head ; but he, looking up, caught the wrath and scorn upon her face and shrank beneath it, even as the Campagna wild flowers shiver and tremble when the hot breath of the Sirocco passes over them

Antonio closed the door after her and walked slowly down the room towards Lord Welford. He stood perfectly quiet and apparently submissive as his lordship with haughty arrogance addressed him. A great patience and gentle dignity seemed to hold in leash the fiery passion and impulse of his southern race.

"Mr. de Lisle," began Welford, "I am not well versed in the customs of your country, but there is a certain code of politeness among gentlemen which teaches them when they intrude upon unsuspecting hospitality. It is no doubt agreeable work to while away the days in so pleasant a spot and with so fair a model from which to draw inspiration ; but can you say truly that it is the love of art only that keeps you so ardent a devotee to your labours ? Has not Mr. de Lisle a more earthly motive than real glory, which he hopes to advance through the Lady Diana's portrait ?"

It was not Welford's words so much as his manner and tone that gave the sting of insult to his address. Antonio never flinched ; he waited a moment and then with a great effort he spoke, his words coming slowly, and with a slightly foreign accent :

"You are but right, my lord. I *had* another motive, as much dearer to me than the success of my art, as is the Lady Diana's beauty above my poor handiwork. I love your sister, and it is for the honour of her love that I strive. I am neither rich nor great, but I wear a blameless name, and can show a pure past. I have offered my love, my life, to the Lady Diana, and I await her answer to my petition."

"That is scarcely sufficient, sir. The Lady Diana listens to no lover and accepts no suitor except as I direct. What your past or future may be I neither know nor care, for your cause is as hopeless as it is pretentious."

"Lord Welford can scarce prevent my constancy," replied Antonio. Then, with a touch of Tuscan poetry, he added, turning to the oleanders : "Since nature's sunshine can blossom into fairest flowers these bare trees, so the sunshine of love can arouse the hardest heart, and overcome all obstacles. I can treasure hope and faith, Lord Welford, without your sanction."

"I wish you joy of your simile," sneered Welford. "If you elect to wait for the blossoming of these oleanders before venturing to pursue your suit, you will serve my cause better than your own ; for, to my own knowledge, not one of them has flowered these ten years or more. It would be weary work waiting for your blooms of imagery to flourish in a woman's heart at such a rate. I think, sir, your myth bears little prospect of fulfilment. *When the oleander*

blooms again, then you will look for the corresponding flower of love in Lady Diana's heart! I give you my consent beforehand to that proposition, for it never will blossom again. Another time, sir, fit your parable more aptly."

He laughed superciliously, and with easy indifference prevented further speech by leaving the room, dismissing de Lisle with a courteous but sarcastic farewell.

Winter came, and Heron's Court was deserted; if Lord Welford had accomplished no other end he had at least broken up all intercourse between Mr. de Lisle and Diana. De Lisle had never come again to Park Lane, and though we heard his name mentioned in society, we never met him. Rumour recounted all manner of things concerning him, but one thing at least was certain: he had fallen, purposely or otherwise, from grace in the shape of society, and the great world let him go as easily and as carelessly, and forgot him as quickly and completely, as it had once petted and spoiled him. And with his disappearance there also disappeared the incomplete portrait of Lady Diana, and one of the oleander trees.

Millicent declared to me in private that she had overheard Welford and Antonio's last words on that morning in October, and that Welford had laughed sneeringly as he said: "Bring me the tree in bloom, then mayhap you will find the corresponding blossoms in the Lady Diana's heart;" and Tito had replied, very gravely: "I have a great faith. I shall return, and the Lady Diana will then listen to me."

When I questioned Camilla Camoys on this sudden exit of her favourite knight, she shrugged her round white shoulders, and said with her little lip: "My dear Theresa! what a horrible barbarian you are! As if one *could* remember who was their favourite of last season. Mr. de Lisle? Oh, yes, he is dead, or dying, or gone to the North Pole, or run off with some one—anything you like, Theresa. Certainly he was very handsome, but then a foreigner, you know—so exacting—and so utterly without discretion, and positively, my dear, *honest*."

And with a nod and a laugh Camilla accepted "Baby" Gresham's arm and walked off with him, smiling just as I had seen her smile upon Tito scores of times.

Early in December we went to Rome, I for once being included in the party, while Millicent was left at home. The morning of our departure a small box was left at the door for Diana, and I took it to her room, where, surrounded by boxes and portmanteaus, she sat looking a little absent and sad. As I handed her the parcel, I noticed in the cold, searching sunlight, that her face was thinner and her cheeks paler than a few months ago. She untied the string listlessly, and raised the lid. On a bed of white wool lay a single pink oleander flower, and on a card attached were the words: *Beware and trust.*

I looked at Diana. Her face had grown strangely tender, her eyes were suffused, her lips trembled. Then suddenly she shut the box

and tossed it from her. "Are you superstitious, Theresa?" she cried sharply; "then here is food for it; make what you can of my anonymous gift. Its message is as melodramatic as one could desire: *Beware and trust.* Of whom shall I beware, and whom shall I trust? Read me the riddle, Theresa."

"Beware, is the meaning of the oleander, according to flower language," I replied, prosaically. "I suppose you are to beware of its charms and trust the sender."

"You are very silly," she answered pettishly, and turned from me shortly; but I noticed later on that the box was empty, and the flower with its message had disappeared.

My recollections of that winter are not very pleasant ones, in spite of the charm and grace of the Eternal City,—a charm and a grace bestowed by centuries of religion united to art in every form and made glorious by the grand legacies of time. Lady Diana was the pivot upon which all our actions turned, and upon her moods rested our happiness or discomfort. At best this was a frail foundation, and we tottered and trembled, and were in daily danger of earthquakes owing to that little lady's uncertain temper.

Very soon after our establishment in a large, echoing palace, full of ghostly memories and traditions, she made her appearance at a grand embassy ball, and as usual her beauty, her wealth, her air of grande dame, won for her many admirers, and Diana, I am sorry to say, encouraged them all. I shudder to think how many sprigs and flowerets of the Roman nobility she wilfully enticed by her Lurelei-witchery and then scornfully rejected.

Lady Paragon and Camilla called the winter a great success, and so I suppose it was. I only know that my life grew broader and calmer under that blue Italian sky, and when I—Protestant though I was—knelt within St. Peter's, I was never lonely. Something of peace and rest came to me then that has never left me since.

As Easter came on, Diana's pale cheeks and bright eyes attracted Lady Paragon's attention, and it was decided in solemn conclave, Lord Welford being of the number, that a summer at one of the German Spas would be better for Diana than a return to England. When Lady Paragon told her their decision, she looked up startled and made a movement forward. "I thought we were to go home," she said. "Indeed, Aunt Parry, there is nothing the matter, and I must go home; I want to be at Heron's Court."

Lord Welford, who was present, laughed a little cold laugh. "Is it Heron's Court you most desire to see, or do the oleander trees call out across the Channel for you to come and behold their miraculous blossoms?"

Diana sat silent. She never spoke to Welford unless forced to do so, and soon she left the room. When next I met her she had been crying, and she held a letter in her hand which she begged me to post for her. The letter was addressed to Millicent Denman.

Easter came, fragrant with big blue violets and white narcissus; all the Campagna was thick strewn with purple and white anemones, the air was sweet with Spring's pungent perfume, and the earth rejoiced in the swift approach of summer. Lady Paragon and Camilla Camoys were busy planning their speedy exodus from the City of Seven Hills. They rejoiced openly at leaving Rome for a common-place German spa, and talked of miasma and Roman fever in the same breath as they chattered about the tables at Monte Carlo, and the eloquence of Monsignor Howard.

Diana joined rarely in their conversation; she had grown very quiet and reserved of late, and her eyes had a strange, far-away expression, as of one in eager search, yet never finding that for which they looked.

That year Easter fell on the last day of March, and Lady Paragon and her party were to leave on the Thursday following, thus securing the solemnities at St. Peter's on Sunday, and a grand ball at the Embassy on Wednesday. Of course Diana was to go to both; I was at liberty to share the carriage, black veils and reserved seats that the cardinals' complaisance placed at Camilla's disposal; but I preferred to go alone, and find a place for myself among the contadini who filled the grand nave, and held up their brown, dark-eyed bambini for the blessing of the Pope as he was carried far above their heads.

As I thus knelt a little apart from the crowd, my wandering attention was attracted by a woman, dressed plainly in black, with a large bonnet and veil. Something in her movements and appearance seemed familiar to me. I could not see her face, but without knowing why I became vaguely alarmed. When she arose from her knees and turned towards the entrance I followed her, but owing to the press of people was unable to come up with her. As she reached the door she turned, and at that moment the heavy leather curtain was lifted from without, and like a silhouette against the clear vivid sunshine that poured in, I saw the face of Millicent Denman. I cried out and started forward, but the silver trumpets rang out, like angel voices, the crowd fell upon their knees, there were moments of utter silence, and then, when I turned again, she was gone.

I told Lady Paragon on my return, but she was blandly incredulous, and Lady Diana laughed in my face.

"My dear Theresa, where would Millicent Denman get the money to come to Italy! And why should she hide herself if she had come?"

All the same, my opinion was not changed; it certainly was Millicent Denman's face I had seen in St Peter's.

Then came the ball, for which Diana departed more beautiful than I had ever seen her, but at a comparatively early hour she returned. She came into my room to explain; she was very tired, and we were to make an early start next day; the Marchesa d'Albino was return-

ing and Aunt Paragon had allowed her to come home under her care. Di crossed the room and flung open the window; the April moon flooded my chamber with a pale silvery light.

Diana, standing in its rays, became etherealised; her ball dress of shimmering blue grew cloud-like, while her beautiful, proud face became tender and gentle as a child's. After a moment she came back to my bed-side.

"Good-night, Theresa," she said lightly; then suddenly she bent down and kissed me. "Theresa, you have always been kind; I thank you a thousand times."

I put out my hand to stop her, but she sprang back and ran lightly away. On my bed, however, lay a locket attached to a fragment of slender gold chain; one side was glass, and beneath the crystal lay some withered petals. In a moment I knew they were those of the anonymous oleander. Diana had dropped the pretty trifle as she kissed me, and Diana had treasured and worn the faded flower. I would return the trinket to her the next day.

The morning came fair and mild, and sweet with the odour of lilies and violets; but alas! for all well-laid plans, not one of Lady Paragon's party left the Platzzo Runini, for the Lady Diana had disappeared!

Her maid, in tears, told how she had put her young mistress to bed, and how she was gay and gentle as a lamb; she had chatted longer than usual, and only departed when her ladyship seemed overcome with sleep; then she had gone early to awaken her, but had not found her. The room was undisturbed, nothing was missing, except Diana's travelling-bag, and a case of jewels that had been her mother's.

This was all we could learn. I told of my interview, but I concealed the locket, saying nothing about it; it belonged to Diana, and what clue could a few withered petals give to her whereabouts? Lady Paragon wept and wrung her hands incessantly. Camilla Camoys went off in hysterics, and was dosed alternately with red lavender and chloral, until she was properly subdued to a state of quiescence. Lord Welford was telegraphed for, and in two days arrived from Homburg in a great rage; all was confusion and consternation, one telling one tale and another contradicting it. Welford grew more and more angry, and at last called upon me to give as lucid a statement of the affair as a woman's brains and tongue would permit. I repeated all I knew, and again spoke of my seeing Millicent Denman in St. Peter's. At her name he broke forth in language scarcely polite for ladies' ears.

"Commend me to women," he said, "for downright stupidity. Of course it was Millicent Denman, Theresa saw; and equally of course it is Millicent who arranged and carried out Diana's flight. I can see it all, and Antonio de Lisle is the load-star. I congratulate your ladyship on the brilliant finale accomplished by your niece!"

But poor Lady Paragon was far too overcome with sorrow and mortification to care for Welford's reproaches.

"Such a disgrace, Theresa," she moaned. "And to have the duchess know that Diana was one of my *débutantes*!" The Duchess of Cavel was Aunt Parry's fetish and oracle; a word of approbation from her Grace, or a frown of disapproval, sent her mental barometer up or down at an alarming pace.

We all left Rome on Sunday, and in due course of time reached England. Acting under Welford's orders, Lady Paragon, Camilla and he went at once to Heron's Court, where he made sure they should find Diana. I was to stop in Park Lane and await further orders.

The season was but scarcely begun as yet, but as I drove along the old familiar streets in a four-wheel cab, my eyes caught sight of many a pretty picture made up of youth and happiness upon which the sun shone full as lovingly as it did in fair Italy. The house in Park Lane looked dull enough; the blinds were all closed. Wearily I rang the bell, and then standing with my back to the door looked across to the Park, where the trees were all decked in their fresh unsullied green, and the hyacinths, in great beds of varying colour, made sweet the light wind that blew across my face.

The door opened, and I turned, with a sigh, to enter. I hurried past the servant and made my way up-stairs. On the landing I paused. The door of Lady Diana's boudoir stood slightly ajar; I heard the murmur of voices, and one, rising above the others, struck terror into my very soul. It was the voice of Antonio de Lisle.

I pushed open the door and stepped across the threshold. The light was subdued, and the room bore the solemn impress of illness, but of illness that touched very closely upon death. On a low bed lay a motionless figure, whose only sign of life was the feverish light in the great, dark eyes, and the ceaseless movement of the lips, that every now and again resulted in a low, piteous cry, followed by random words of Italian. A slight dark form rose up from beside the bed and came towards me. It was the Lady Diana.

But ah, how changed, and how transfigured! All her wealth of golden hair had grown as white as though the snows of seventy years had powdered it; her eyes were unnaturally large and wore a look of patient pain and endurance; the colour had flown from her cheeks, the young face had lost its rounded outline; there were shadows about the mouth and temples, and a listlessness of movement pathetic in one so young. She put up her hand to arrest my exclamation.

"Hush!" she said, and her voice was dull and hard. "Do not disturb him; he is so very, very ill." Then as she looked at me more closely: "Is it you, Theresa? I thought it was Millicent. When did you come? How did you know? Are they all here, Theresa?" with a frightened look towards the door.

I took her cold hands in mine.

"I am alone, Diana," I said, "and I have come to help you."

Then she broke down and laid her head upon my shoulder, weeping violently. "He is so very, very ill," she sobbed; "they say he will die, and I was cruel to him; and oh, Theresa, I love him! See," she went on, and drew me towards one of the windows that led into a tiny conservatory: "he said he should win me through his faith and his art. It is a great thing to have such faith, Theresa. Do you remember what Welford said when he compared his love for me to the bare oleander tree? He, Tito, answered, that he still believed in miracles; and see here, Theresa, what his prayers have done! This is the oleander from Heron's Court, that for ten long years had never borne bud or blossom. Look what faith and prayer have wrought! * Would you know it again, Theresa?"

She pushed me gently into the conservatory, and there indeed stood the tree I had last seen bare and flowerless, covered now with pale pink blossoms that glowed in roseate beauty; the warm air was permeated with its faint perfume. I looked in amazement from Diana to the flowering shrub; both were transformed, and yet both were a part of my life. Diana did not speak again; she glided from me, returning once more to her watch beside Antonio de Lisle's sick bed.

That evening Millicent told me the tale. After Diana had gone to Italy she went one day to Heron's Court, and there found that Tito was in the habit of visiting the place in secret. She bribed old Macduff to let her know of his next visit, and she caught him in the room they had called the studio, at work upon Diana's portrait. He looked very ill, but was most hopeful, not only for his art, but that he should win Diana. "But that will only be," he had said, "when the oleander blossoms again."

Certainly nothing ever looked less like bursting into flower than the insensate tree, with its dark-green leaves and tough bark. Millicent wrote to Diana of Tito's infatuation, and scarce a letter passed that did not bear some reference to him.

The winter came; long, dull, grey days, and still Antonio worked on perseveringly and unremittingly. Millicent saw him from time to time, looking ill and worn, and then as the early spring advanced she lost sight of him. But one morning a little boy brought her a note. It was from Antonio; a few lines, weak and trembling. Always warm-hearted, she determined to go to him, and she found him, but too ill to recognise her. For a week she nursed him, and in that week two things occurred: his picture was accepted at the Royal Academy, and the *oleander burst into full flower*.

But Antonio never knew that his efforts were thus crowned with success. He lay stricken down with fever, and day succeeded day, as he tossed on his bed of pain. Then Millicent went to Rome, and

* A fact.

saw Diana. She told her of his love, his constancy, his faith, his prayers, and Diana's heart responded only too readily to her supplication. Together they planned their flight. On reaching London, Diana insisted on having Tito removed to her own comfortable house, and sent for Mrs. Prosser, the old housekeeper at the Court, "to make it quite proper," as Millicent said, with a little laugh.

"But, Millicent," I asked, "how could you undertake such a responsibility? I am not sure but that abetting a young lady in her love affairs, when not of age, is actionable, and I am quite certain that Welford would not at all mind bringing a suit against you."

"Then Diana and I will plead our own cause," replied Milly, "and win over judge and jury in a twinkling. Only fancy Diana appearing at Westminster with her lovely eyes and white hair! Why there's not a barrister alive wouldn't dance out of wig and gown to serve her. Did you notice her hair, Theresa? It turned snow-white during our journey from Italy. It was the only sign the anxiety and strain of those two terrible days left upon her."

I think there is little more to be told. Antonio de Lisle did recover, but not until the summer was far on the wane. Lord Welford and Lady Paragon were very angry with Lady Diana, and threatened many things, but Welford had pledged his word to yield consent when the oleander bloomed again, and he was too true a gentleman to forget, and as Diana seemed unconscious of them all, in time their ire died out for want of fuel to feed it. Antonio's portrait of the Lady Diana and oleander blooms, was the gem of the Academy; it hangs now at Heron's Court, and is treasured beyond all price.

In October, the old, grey church in Hampshire was gaily decked and festooned in honour of the young bride who walked forth from out its shadowy porch, her hand upon her husband's arm. It is not necessary for me to say that the beautiful bride was the Lady Diana and her husband Antonio de Lisle.

That was twelve years ago, and yet I think you will not easily find another such home, or such married happiness as theirs.

Do you know now whose is the spirit that dominates the Lady Diana's boudoir, and why her lovely eyes are retrospective and a little sad?

My friends, we can bear with marvellous fortitude trials almost beyond human strength, but they leave their traces, indelible and indefaceable, upon our hearts, and of what the heart endures the countenance is oftentimes the mirror.

The oleander has never bloomed again.

COUSIN BARBARA'S PREJUDICE.

"YOU mean, then, Trevor, that you have the serious intention of marrying this Miss Craigie?"

"I don't think, Cousin Barbara, that I have ever mentioned the word marriage; before I speak of such a thing I must first discover if sweet Madge Craigie loves me."

"Sweet Madge Craigie, indeed! Fancy calling her sweet! Commend me to a man for being taken in by a pair of bright eyes and a silly giggle! No man ever knew yet who was his truest friend—Miss Craigie isn't yours."

"My dear cousin, you are prejudiced. Madge has lived a great deal abroad, and acquired manners which I will acknowledge do not exactly resemble those you are accustomed to see every day; but she is none the less true and loyal and womanly, on that account, while she is certainly ten times more fascinating than most of the people one meets."

"Humph!" growled Cousin Barbara. "Well, those who live the longest will see the most."

Then there was a silence: Trevor Lane, who was an artist, went on with his painting, and the middle-aged spinster he called Cousin Barbara, sewed her white seam with much diligence as she sat in the sunlight on an old settle by the window.

Cross-grained though Barbara was, there was one being she loved with a deep, fervent devotion, and that being was Trevor Lane. And so she ought, for he had been the kindest of friends to her. Left, at the age of fifty, without a sixpence, Trevor Lane, who was only her second cousin, had invited her to come and live with him and manage his house for him. This for the last five years she had done right conscientiously, both as regards housekeeping and the giving such good advice as she considered a young man required.

Trevor Lane accepted both services with apparent gratitude, bearing the infliction of constant advice with so much resignation, even cheerfulness, that he proved himself to be a thoroughly good-tempered fellow.

The fact was he was truly sorry for his cousin Barbara, who had, he considered, been soured by bad treatment in the past; and, though it was no fault of his, yet he was resolved if possible to make her life fair and happy in the future. Hence every cross word he answered with a caress, every recommendation that he should alter his ways with a promise that he would be circumspect.

And so five years had dawdled on, and the summers at Heathfield,

about ten miles from London, where Trevor Lane's studio and pretty home were situated, came and went with but few incidents to disturb the even current of the cousins' ways—till Madge Craigie came.

This was the evil day for which Cousin Barbara had never ceased to look—the day on which Trevor Lane would elect to devote to another some portion of the love she wished to appropriate wholly to herself.

"Trevor was not yet thirty, how could she expect it to be otherwise?" she would ask herself, repeatedly. Then she would shake her head and mutter: "If I could only like her: but this Madge, this flighty, silly Madge—to marry my Trevor! Ah, me!" Cousin Barbara failed utterly to recognise that whoever the girl was on whom Trevor bestowed his affection, she would consider her objectionable and displeasing.

For a long while there was no sound heard in the studio save the flies buzzing on the window-panes and the old clock ticking on the mantel-shelf. Trevor himself at last broke the silence.

"Madge is coming here this evening, Cousin Barbara—you will be civil to her for my sake, will you not?"

Miss Barbara looked up suddenly and saw the light of love in Trevor's flashing eyes, the glow of a deep passion on his handsome face, and the sight of it seemed to chill her heart to ice.

She answered coldly: "Miss Craigie wants no warm words from me; since you can utter them so glibly it is enough; but for the last time I say—beware."

Trevor Lane went on working deliberately at his picture; and Miss Barbara, huddling up the white work on which she was engaged into a bundle, escaped with it to her own apartment.

When this scene took place the afternoon was already pretty far advanced, and the month being May it was not very late when the sun finally departed behind the western hills. Trevor could no longer see to paint, but he lingered on in the studio, gazing dreamily at his picture till it was nearly dark.

At last he shook himself back into reality, and raising some portières which divided the studio from the dwelling room in which he and Barbara usually sat, he went in, struck a match and lighted a lamp which stood on his own particular writing-table.

"I wonder if she will come—I almost hope she will not. Till this prejudice of Cousin Bab's is over-ruled, I must try and keep her from the house. I would not for worlds that she should know that Bab has taken fancies into her head about her."

And, half-murmuring his thoughts aloud, he proceeded to answer two or three business letters which had arrived during the day. One of them necessitated reference to some old papers, and, taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked the side drawer of his table and began to look for the document he required.

So absorbed was he in his search, or the subject that caused it, that

for the time Madge Craigie and the trouble with Cousin Barbara was forgotten.

It was not till a light hand was laid on his shoulder and a rippling laugh fell on his ear that he looked up from the open drawer into the sweet face of the lady who had bewitched him.

"Is this what you call meeting me by the garden gate and bringing me in to tea with Cousin Bab? Look you, sir, I have a mind to be very angry."

"Not with me to-night, sweet lady. I have had much to trouble and vex me—a letter here which gives me endless worry. Besides, Cousin Bab has gone to bed; she is not well."

"Gone to bed! Oh, then, I ought not to have come, I suppose."

"Since you are here, however, you will not go. Let us chat together, for a little; later on I will see you home."

And he rolled an easy chair to where she stood, and invited her to sink down into its softness, for Trevor Lane was a sybarite in his home. Madge Craigie obeyed him, and, tossing her straw hat from her head to the ground, lay back among soft cushions, her golden wavy hair and white skin forming a striking contrast to their crimson hue.

For a moment or two he sat and gazed at her in mute admiration, till her merry laugh recalled him to himself.

"One would think that I am a picture," she said, "instead of ——"

"So you are a picture—a lovely picture—the embodiment of my perfect ideal. Say, Madge, beautiful Madge, will you be my own, my wife, my very true, devoted, loving wife?"

She looked into his eyes, still laughing.

"Dear me, what an amount of truth, and devotion, and tenderness you seem to require. And pray may I ask how much you intend to give in return?"

"My thoughts by day, my dreams by night, everything I have shall be yours, if only you will consent. My dearest Madge, do not keep me in suspense, but tell me ——"

"Stop your rhapsodies, foolish man! Believe me, I am not worth them. I'll acknowledge, however, that I am rather fond of you, perhaps on account of the spontaneity there is about you. Hope it will last, though—there, there, don't gush again. I believe you'll try and be true to me, and"—with more seriousness of manner—"I will never be false to you."

He tried to take her in his arms, but she repulsed him gently, bidding him be rational and discuss their future prospects calmly. And so, for awhile, they did, no allusion being made to Cousin Barbara, or the part she was likely to play in their lives.

On a sudden Madge's eye fell on the open drawer.

"Wilfrid Lane!" she exclaimed, pointing to some papers on which that name was written. "Wilfrid Lane! Is he a relation of yours? How odd I should never have thought of that before."

"Why? Do you know him?"

"I know Wilfrid Lane! As well as though he were my own brother."

"How strange! He is my half-brother."

"Yes, he is much older than you are. When did you see him last?"

"I have not seen him for seven years."

"Ah, of course; he is always abroad. But you go abroad sometimes; why not to see your brother?"

"There have been family differences, Madge."

"Oh! It will be awkward when we are married, if I may never see Wilfrid. I wonder what he will say when he hears I am going to marry you."

A sort of shiver passed over Trevor Lane.

"My brother Wilfrid is scarcely the sort of man with whom I should care for my wife to be on intimate terms," he said.

"Oh yes, I know he is a vaurien, but that can't hurt me, and he is very amusing. Quite a treat to see his dear old hand-writing in your drawer."

"He ruined Cousin Barbara—that is why she is here," persisted Trevor.

"Very likely. He ruined my father and my father ruined him; that's why I am poor. Yet I owe him no grudge, Trevor; why should you?" and once more she looked into his eyes with that strange mesmeric power she had, which set every nerve in his body vibrating.

And from talk of Wilfrid Lane they drifted back once more to themselves and their own affairs, murmuring together softly in the light of the pale moon, which had risen and cast a magic spell over the scene: broken at last, however, by a little scream from Madge.

"What is it? I heard something moving. Is it a bogey or Cousin Bab?"

"Cousin Bab!" And Trevor, indignant lest Bab should have been listening, went through the portières into the painting-room, the moon as it were followed him.

No one to be seen—out into the garden he passed. Barbara was in her room; he could see the reflection of her form on the drawn blind. Instead of returning to the spot where he had left Madge, he walked down the garden and called to her to come to him. "The night was so beautiful, the moon so bright," he said, "it was better there than indoors."

From the garden they strolled into an adjoining wood, along a pathway leading to the village where Miss Craigie dwelt. The vicar was her uncle, and she was on a visit there for a while. Nor did they come back to Trevor's cottage that evening; on the contrary, he went into the Vicarage and stayed talking to the vicar till past ten o'clock.

How he should tell Barbara that he was absolutely engaged to Madge Craigie puzzled him not a little during his walk home, and

probably would have engrossed him even more had not his thoughts been diverted from it by almost a feeling of annoyance that his Madge should be on friendly terms with the half-brother whose very name was never mentioned in Heathfield Cottage.

When he reached home all was as silent as the grave; the glass door leading from the sitting-room to the garden was ajar, as Miss Craigie had left it when she joined him, the lamp was still burning on the writing-table, everything was as he had left it. No—the drawer was still wide open, but the papers had been touched. He noticed it at a glance; those which had attracted Madge Craigie's attention, with Wilfrid Lane's name on them, were gone.

Pearly drops burst forth on Trevor's brow as he perceived it, and staggering into the seat which Madge had but recently quitted, he remained there for a time immovable. What did she know of Wilfrid Lane, was the question he asked himself over and over again. Were the details of this man's shameful past known to her—had she had aught to do with them? Could it be possible that she had made the excuse of sending him away in search of bogies, while she possessed herself of letters and documents inculcating Wilfrid Lane? No—no—the thought was madness!

Yet the papers were gone, and that they did inculcate Wilfrid Lane very heavily there was little doubt, since more than one of them was a forgery of his half-brother's name, and it was by the holding of them that Trevor succeeded in keeping the vaurien out of England, and his own hearth and home in peace.

Cousin Barbara's warnings against Miss Craigie rose like spectres into his mind, and would not be chased away, let him struggle as resolutely as he would. Madge and none other had been in that room, and the papers were gone—the case was conclusive. And he had promised to marry this woman! What should he do? Go to her as soon as possible, accuse her straightforwardly of the theft, demand the return of the stolen papers, and then spurn her image for ever from his heart.

That was the decision he arrived at while he sat gazing at the open drawer, and the clock struck four before he attempted to go to bed.

To bed, but not to sleep; and when he met Cousin Barbara at breakfast, he looked pale and haggard, and was very silent, while Bab grumbled away in her usual style over the thousand and one petty annoyances which she managed to find at every turn.

At last Trevor rose and took up his hat.

"Going out, Trevor, instead of to work?"

He leant over her, and kissed her. "Ay, only for a little while, dear cousin. I shall soon be back, and we will have some long hours together in the painting-room."

"Yes—silent hours, while you are dreaming of that Miss Craigie's false bewitching face. You will rue it, Trevor—you'll rue it, as I am a living woman."

He was gone, but her words followed him all through the wood ; seemed to be echoing among the leaves.

In the Vicarage garden stood Madge, fresh and pure and lovely-looking, in the daintiest of blue muslins. She kissed her hand to him when from some distance she perceived him, and he scarcely returned the salutation as coldly as he intended, for at the sight of her more than half his suspicions seemed to disappear.

Her love a sham, her kisses but to betray ? Could woman be so false ?

"Oh, Trevor," she cried out when he was within hearing, "such glorious news I have for you. Your brother Wilfrid has not so utterly ruined my father as was at first imagined ! Some of the property is saved, and I shall have a *dot*, and not come to your home an utter beggar."

"I do not want money," answered Trevor, scarcely graciously. "I have enough for both."

"Why, Trevor, what has happened ? How gloomy and stern you look."

"Something has happened which has upset me exceedingly. Those letters—Wilfrid's letter, that you saw in my drawer last night—are gone." And he looked at her very fixedly while he spoke.

"Gone—what do you mean ?"

"Some one has taken them away : do you know who it is ?"

"Trevor, you frighten me—don't glance at me like that—but tell me—whose interest would it be to take them ? What are they about ?"

"I am afraid you know full well what they are about."

"I ! Why, it was only last night I discovered that Wilfrid Lane was your brother."

"Ah ! You are a good actress, Miss Craigie."

"Trevor—great heaven, Trevor—you do not believe that I — oh, this is too absurd !"

"You know nothing of the disappearance of those letters ?"

"Nothing, upon my word—as I stand here a living woman, I swear it."

He shook his head ; her very determined assurance made him doubt her more, and he turned away.

"Alas, Miss Craigie, that I should live to say it, but till those letters are found I can enter into no further engagement. Robbing me of them could be the act of no common thief, attracted by an open door ; other valuables which were in the room have not disappeared."

"As you will," she answered, bowing her head proudly. "If you can believe this of me, it is indeed better we should part."

And so, as Trevor had promised, in less than an hour he returned to Barbara in the studio ; but during all that day, and for many days to come, both the conversation and the painting went on haltingly.

Miss Craigie he did not see again, and report said she lay ill at the Vicarage ; but this report did not reach Trevor Lane, since he never went out of the house now ; and so no one but his cousin Barbara heard it, and she, in her gruff, rough way, said : " It was wiser to let sleeping dogs lie, and make no allusion to Miss Craigie, with whom it was evident that Trevor had quarrelled," though he had never vouchsafed to tell Barbara about the letters. He did not care to allude to them, for one reason, and he thought their loss might worry Barbara, for another.

Heavily the weeks passed by, and the autumn tints were mellowing the trees in the little wood. Madge Craigie had left Heathfield, and already the episode of her love passages with Trevor Lane was forgotten. Forgotten by all but him ; he could never forget the vision of beauty that had crossed his path, and changed so speedily into a hideous spectre.

No, he would never marry now. So he had told Barbara more than once of late, and a smile had for a moment lighted up her wrinkled, soured face at his words.

Towards the end of October a change came to the every-day routine of Heathfield Cottage. Barbara fell ill. Seized with a paralytic stroke, she lay speechless and powerless. The grand doctor Trevor sent for from London said she might rally, but it was doubtful ; at all events, she would never be the same again.

The solicitude and devotion Trevor showed her was rather that of a son than a cousin, forsaking even his beloved painting to remain by her bedside and minister to her every want. If ever a woman ought to have been happy and at peace, Cousin Barbara was that woman. But content was not one of her acquirements, and she kept up her character for fretfulness to the extent of trying Trevor's patience not a little. There was evidently something she wished to say, and that her loss of speech prevented ; and Trevor's repeated recommendation that she should remain quiet till she was better, only served to annoy her.

He was sitting with her at the wane of day, the room only lighted by a feeble gleam of departing twilight, and an occasional flicker from a wood fire. Cousin Barbara made a strange unearthly sound, and pointed with the fore-finger of her left hand to an old bureau which stood in the corner. Trevor took little notice at first, but she was so persistent that at last he rose and unfastened the bureau. Its carved doors shut in rows of small drawers, one after another. He opened several of them but found nothing, and was beginning to think that he was merely the victim of a sick woman's caprice, when on a sudden he uttered a cry. There, in one of them, was the bundle of documents marked Wilfrid Lane.

He turned and glared on the woman who lay in the bed looking at him almost piteously. It was the first time Barbara had ever seen anger against herself expressed in Trevor's eyes, and she cowered

beneath it, closing her own, and pulling the bed-clothes over her face.

He did not attempt to speak to her, but taking up the letters walked out of the room, called the little maid of the establishment and bade her go to her mistress. Then, the letters still in his hand, he put on his hat and went out.

Poor, wretched Barbara; her punishment, when they told her he was gone, was almost more than she could bear. He had never forgiven Madge Craigie when he believed her to be the thief, how then could Barbara hope to be forgiven.

All that night he did not return, and during the next day there was no sign from him; the servants and neighbours did the best they could for Barbara, who was so quiet and enduring and patient, that they all believed the end must be very near, since no one had ever seen her so subdued before.

Twenty-four hours had passed since Trevor Lane went away with the letters, when a London hansom drove up to the garden-gate, and he himself got out, accompanied by Madge Craigie.

She looked very ill and wan, and was by no means the handsome Madge she had been five months ago; still there was a bright expression in her eyes which looked like returning happiness.

Trevor led her straight upstairs to Barbara, whose agitation on beholding her was painful to witness, but Madge knelt down beside the bed, and taking the old woman's hand she kissed it gently.

"You loved him so, you grudged him to me, did you not, poor cousin? Well, he has promised for my sake to forgive you, and together we will try and nurse you back to health, and you will on your part try to love me just a little."

Barbara nodded her head in assent, and the doctor coming in at that moment ordered no more talking; so the lovers, restored to bliss in each other's society, went downstairs into the studio, and the old lady with a load taken off her mind was left by means of one of Dr. Bell's draughts to have a few hours of quiet sleep. Nor did Cousin Barbara die. She fought vigorously with death for a day or two, as though she were determined to conquer the foe, and for awhile she succeeded. She would never be able to speak quickly or sharply again, but she managed to make herself understood, and in expressing her deep contrition for the past she kept her word when she said she would always be gracious and pleasant to her new cousin in the future.

So Trevor and Madge were married. Of course Cousin Barbara had to give up the housekeeping to the young wife; but she still kept her place in the studio window, though the white work was no longer on her lap, and instead of it the poor powerless right hand lay on her knee as though seeking strength in the sunshine.

SWALLOW, SWALLOW!

NEVER talk to birds.

For several months an unmistakable flirtation had been carried on between Captain Algernon Clayton and Miss Lilian Murray. The first was a captain in a marching regiment, the last a very decided heiress, whose beauty and riches were formidably protected in the person of an old bachelor uncle, her guardian.

At seventeen it is so delightful to outwit guardians; to scoff confidently at all their prosaic warnings, and to feel so sure that there never has been, and never will be again, such a pure unselfish love, as that which the captain in a marching regiment feels for the sweet, persecuted girl who has the ill-luck to be an heiress.

When uncle had glowered fiercely at the suitor for about a month, and, finding reasonable representations useless, had threatened to carry off his ward unless she gave up all thoughts of the penniless lover, then Secrecy came to help Love, and the old apple-tree near the orchard gate became a post-office.

All this was very discreditable to Lilian. If she had been a properly brought-up girl she would have known at a glance that Captain Clayton was all very well as a partner at a ball, being very fascinating and a capital dancer; but a husband is another matter. A husband should always have *money*. Never mind about character or disposition. A man of most noble resolves and amiable temperament will gain nothing from society but a doubtful shake of the head if he be poor; but if a man be rich, and has no character—ask any well-bred dowager if he cannot always *buy* one? Lilian was horribly ignorant.

One lovely summer's eve they met. "My darling! all is against us," cried the soldier; "we had better part now, and end our sorrow."

"No, no!" earnestly responded Lilian. "I love you; and I cannot, cannot forget you."

"Then I must take you away with me; say, will you give up all brighter dreams, and be a poor soldier's wife?"

She *had* no brighter dreams, so she said, "Yes."

Uncle's eyes saw nothing. He thought his words had taken effect, and that his ward was amenable to all his persuasions. He endeavoured to interest her mind in fossils and botanical specimens, and felt sure he had hit the right nail on the head.

One evening Lilian sang to herself the song of "Swallow, Swallow, flying South." She was in the large empty drawing-room; and then she strolled out on the terrace, where twilight and moonlight were gently waging war against each other. Throwing a light shawl over

her lovely golden head she wandered towards the old apple-tree. Yes, there was a note ; and it ran thus :

"MY ADORED LILIAN,—Meet me to-morrow evening at eight—the old tree. All is arranged, and we part no more !—A. C."

As her trembling hands refolded the paper, she raised her beautiful blue eyes and beheld a bird skimming low through the air. In uncontrollable sentiment she cried :

"Swallow, swallow ! tell him I will come !"

"By Jove, *no*, swallow ! she'll do nothing of the kind !" angrily exclaimed uncle's voice. And at hearing the same, Lilian fainted.

Five years after. Pining, sorrowful, faithful ? Oh dear, no. At seventeen Lilian was *ignorant* ; at twenty-two she is a leader of fashion, and the wife of a nonentity, with ten thousand a-year ; and *she* says :

"My dear girls, avoid love if you can : but if you ever mean to indulge seriously in the foolish dream, avoid my pit-fall. Never talk to birds !"

MINNIE DOUGLAS.



LIFE IS BUT A DAY.

A BLITHESOME maid, at early morn,
Comes tripping lightly o'er the lea ;
Of all God's creatures ever born
The brightest, gladdest heart has she.
And owning by her speech the sway
Of rapt emotion, she doth say :—

"How glad a thing is life !"

O'ercome at last by midday heat,
And well nigh unremitting toil,
A man of care lay down to sleep,
And snatch repose from life's turmoil.
He woke, and with a sigh he said,
As Care reigned in Oblivion's stead :—

"How sad a thing is life !"

An aged pair at eve draw near,
With faltering steps, a lone churchyard ;
Death long to them has lost its fear,
Although, in youth, to die seemed hard.
All hope in time has passed away,
Yet from the heart each one doth say :

"How grand a thing is life !"

F. W. J.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

GODFREY COULD SCARCELY RESTRAIN HIMSELF FROM DASHING OUT FROM HIS AMBUSH.

E. AND E. TAYLOR.